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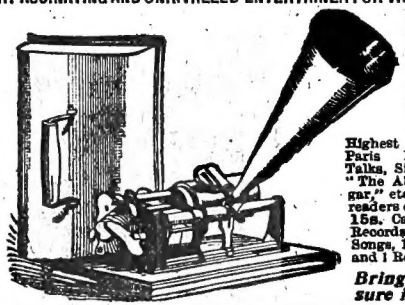

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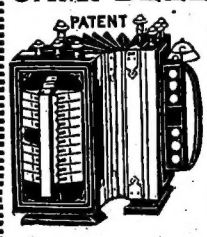

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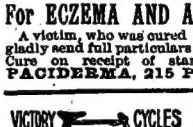

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SHORT STORIES

No. 690.] [One Penny.

For the Week Ending March 22nd, 1902.

Thrilling New Serial. **Start To-day.**

LINK BY LINK.

The Opening of the Story.

Gerald Mortimer lives with his widowed mother and a small brother and sister at Moulstone Manor House. A great friend of his is Dr. Branksome, medical attendant at Moulstone Asylum. One night when Gerald is returning from a visit to the doctor, he is encountered by a wild looking woman, in a long blue cloak, who appears to be waiting about for someone. Gerald asks her if he can help her in any way. She refuses help and suddenly rushes away. Gerald starts to follow but loses all trace of her in a thick wood.

At breakfast the next morning, news reaches the Manor House that one of the asylum patients has escaped. Gerald at once thinks of the woman he met on the previous night, but learns that the missing person is a man.

Nina Penhurst, governess to the Mortimer children, meets Gerald in the garden, after he has been to the asylum to tell Dr. Branksome of his previous night's encounter, and learns further particulars of the missing patient from him. Gerald tells Nina that the man thought he had been cheated out of some property, and that his name was Anthony, not Felix.

"Felix—Anthony—he thinks his name is Anthony—Anthony what?" she asks.

"Cordelvin—Anthony Cordelvin."

Nina Penhurst looks up quickly as Gerald Mortimer utters the name. Then she makes as though to step forward and falls in a dead swoon.

In a back street in Whitechapel lives a broken-down doctor, Ephraim Manisty by name. The night after the escape from Moulstone Asylum, he is visited by a man giving the name of Causton, who offers him a fee of £1,000 to amputate the left arm of a friend of his at Streatham. Manisty consents and drives off with Causton. They do not notice that they are followed by a cab containing a woman in a dark blue cloak. She watches them enter the grounds of the house at Streatham.

When Manisty sees his patient, who is in charge of Causton's son, he finds that nothing is the matter with his left arm, but on Causton threatening to shoot him if he does not perform the operation he consents to do it.

A week later Nina Penhurst and her two young charges, Harold and Gladys Mortimer, are out for a walk, during which they visit the ruins of Moulstone Castle. While the children are playing, Gerald comes on the scene, and declares his love for Nina. She says she cannot accept it, but gives no reason. Just at this moment a cry of distress is heard from Harold. Gerald rushes to the spot, and there finds that the boy has discovered the dead body of a man dressed in Asylum clothes, with his left arm missing, it having been clumsily amputated.

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The following day Gerald goes round to see Dr. Branksome, who tells him that he has received only that morning an anonymous letter containing £20 to pay for Felix Cordelvin's funeral. On seeing the letter Gerald finds that it is from Nina. Dr. Branksome's assistant comes in just at that moment to ask him to come and see one of the patients, and excusing himself to Gerald he goes out.

With eyes almost starting from his head Gerald gazes for a moment at the door as it closes behind the two doctors. Then his hands seek his throbbing temples.

"From her!" he gasps; "from Nina! Heavens, and Branksome is going to hand the letter over to the police. No, no, he must not! She is innocent—I swear she is innocent; but this anonymous letter in the hands of the police! No, they must not have it."

He steps to the desk as he speaks, pulls out the drawer with trembling hand, and once more holds the letter.

"Nina's handwriting!" he whispers hoarsely to himself, "there's no doubt of that. Fortunately Branksome is unable to recognise it. Nobody else must see it!" He springs towards the bright fire, and, bending down, thrusts the letter among the living coals. Then after watching the flames consume it he goes out, leaving a brief message of regret to Branksome with a servant.

In a house at Streatham, two men, Roderick Vanstone, who had passed under the name of Causton, and his son Stephen, are in conversation, from which it transpires that the elder Vanstone is the legal guardian of Nina Penhurst, who had lived with him for some time until his persecutions drove her away. Mark Cordelvin, a distant relative of Nina's who had adopted her, had an only son, Anthony, who was weak-minded, and to him Mark had left a life interest in his fortune, it having to go to Nina on Anthony's death. Owing to the latter's affliction, the care of the money was intrusted to Vanstone, who, taking advantage of Anthony's misfortune, was using it for his own ends.

On Gerald Mortimer's return from the asylum he suddenly resolves to go to London to find Nina, and set off by the first train. After dinner in London, he strolls along the Embankment where it is getting foggy.

"Please excuse me, but could you tell me whereabouts the Temple Station is?"

Gerald swerves round at the words.

"I know it is close by," the voice pursues, "but owing to the fog I am not quite sure where it is."

Gerald does not reply. He tries to but instead, he gasps out an exclamation.

For the voice that addresses him is the voice of a woman. And the woman is the woman with the blue cloak!

CHAPTER VIII. (*continued.*)

As Gerald Mortimer realised that the strange woman before him was the one whom he had met on the lonely road close to Moulstone Asylum, his heart quickened. For here within a couple of yards of him was the one person in the world who might throw light upon the murder of Felix Cordelvin. Light upon that deed was, indeed, of the supremest importance. Justice demanded it—the justice of England. But to Gerald there was something more insistent than justice and the law. There was the strong, inward demand; the personal craving for the exoneration from suspicion of the one girl who to him was more than all the world beside. If, then, this woman *knew*, and would speak what she knew, Nina Penhurst would be for ever rid of the network of circumstances which seemed to be gradually closing about her.

With such thoughts running like warning spirits through his brain, Gerald felt instinctively that this encounter might mean everything to him. It behoved him to maintain the utmost self-control, and to exercise the utmost care.

So, with her inquiry: "Can you please tell me where Temple Station is?" still in his ears, he pulled himself together and replied:

"I am walking in that direction and will show you." He paused a moment, and then added quickly:

"Excuse my question, madam, but were you not down in Kent a few days ago? Did I not meet you near Moulstone?"

The woman stopped dead, pressing her hand to her left side as if a bullet had struck her there. Even in the mist, Gerald could see that her face was working convulsively. Her voice trembled harshly as she answered:

"I do not understand! What have you to do with me? I must go. I can find my way alone!"

"Not so fast, madam!" returned Gerald, placing a restraining hand lightly on her shoulder. "Before you leave me you must answer my questions. Why were you in Moulstone that night?"

She shrank back within the shadow of the wall.

"Why do you ask?" she demanded. "Are you connected with the police?"

Gerald shook his head. "No," he replied, "I am nothing to do with them. But my question. I met you not far from Moulstone Asylum at midnight. Why were you there?"

"Had I not as much right to be there as you?"

"Assuredly; but you should be willing to account for your presence there in view of what has happened."

She looked up quickly with those strange burning eyes of hers.

"Ah, yes!" she murmured, "in view of what has occurred. I know, you mean the murder!"

"Yes; the murder of Felix Cordelvin, the lunatic who escaped."

At the mention of the name the woman's whole expression and manner changed. Hitherto she had spoken rationally and guardedly. Now, she blurted out with a hollow laugh:

"Fools—all fools! Murder of Felix Cordelvin! Ha, ha, ha! Fools, fools, all fools!"

She shook with a strange commingling of amusement and agitation. Her mood seemed one of madness. Gerald saw he had a difficult task to perform.

"Do you know anything of the murder of Felix Cordelvin?" he asked bluntly.

"Fools—all fools!" she repeated, rolling her head strangely. "Ask the panther or ask the cub, they will tell you! They're there!" She waved a gloved hand towards the Savoy Hotel as she uttered the apparently meaningless words: "Up there, they know all, and they can tell. I am going!" And in an instant she started off.

In a couple of strides Gerald was alongside her. In her present hysterical mood, it was hopeless, he saw, to question her. He must manage to see her again when she was calmer.

"Where do you live?" he demanded.

"Under the sun and the stars," she returned with another laugh.

"Madam, don't trifle. It is of the utmost importance I should know your address. What is it?"

She did not reply, but walked on in silence, her hands diving deep into her muff.

"If you do not tell me where you live," Gerald said sternly, "I shall follow you to your door. O-h! What have you done?"

His concluding words were accompanied by a moan of pain. His hands flew instinctively to his smarting eyes. For, from her muff, the woman had drawn out a small tissue bag of sand, and, even while Gerald was speaking, had suddenly swerved round and scattered it over his face. Even as he stood with his knuckles doubled in his handkerchief trying to clear his smarting sight of those gritty particles, he was conscious of the sound of the woman's retreating footsteps, and, utterly dismayed at the thought of losing track of her, he staggered on a step or two. But then he stopped. For the time he was completely blind, and the stinging sensation in his

His hands flew instinctively to his eyes, for, from her muff, the woman had drawn a small bag of sand and scattered it over his face.

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eyes was awful. Pursuit was hopeless. The echo of approaching footsteps reached his ears, slow footsteps of regular tread.

"Are you a police officer?" inquired Gerald as the steps drew alongside him.

The footsteps ceased.

"Yes, sir! Anything wrong?"

"I can't see you!" Gerald rejoined. "I have just been temporarily blinded by a woman."

The policeman's bull's eye was round in a second, and its shaft of light upon Gerald's face.

"Sand," muttered the officer, "thank God it ain't vitrol." He wiped some particles away as he spoke. "Best thing 'ud be for you to go to the hospital, sir—King's College Hospital. I'll take you if you like, sir."

A cab was hailed, and in five minutes drew up at the main entrance to the hospital.

CHAPTER IX.

An Important Envelope which was Overlooked.

"It's certainly most strange, Myers," remarked Dr. Branksome when, about ten minutes after Gerald Mortimer's departure, he returned to his sitting-room in the asylum. "I'll swear I put that letter back in my desk just when you came to fetch me. I've only been absent about a quarter of an hour, and now the letter's not to be found anywhere."

"It is peculiar," responded the other medical man, knitting his brows behind his spectacles. "And it's a very important letter, isn't it?"

"Most important! Likely, in fact, to furnish a clue to the murder. There's a man coming down from Scotland Yard to-day to investigate the affair, and now, hang it all, I'm unable to find what seems to me to be far and away the most important bit of evidence we've come across yet. It is annoying."

"But you left your friend Mortimer here, didn't you? Think he can have taken the letter away by mistake?"

"Impossible! I certainly gave him the letter to read, but then I distinctly remember placing it back in that drawer."

"But mightn't Mortimer have wanted to have another look at it?"

"Oh, he wouldn't go to my drawer. And yet——" Dr. Branksome suddenly pulled himself up. Then he added, "Oh, no, Mortimer couldn't have had it."

Nevertheless, the first thing that Branksome did after the departure of his colleague was to put on his coat and hat and make his exit from the asylum. He was bound for the Manor House.

At once, on sending up his name, he was admitted to the presence of Mrs. Mortimer.

"I am sorry, Dr. Branksome," she remarked in answer to his inquiry, "but Gerald has gone to town."

"To London? Has he really? He said nothing of his intention to me this afternoon."

"I don't think he had any intention of going then. He remembered some business he had to do, quite suddenly, and left by the next train."

"H'm, will he be back to-morrow, Mrs. Mortimer?"

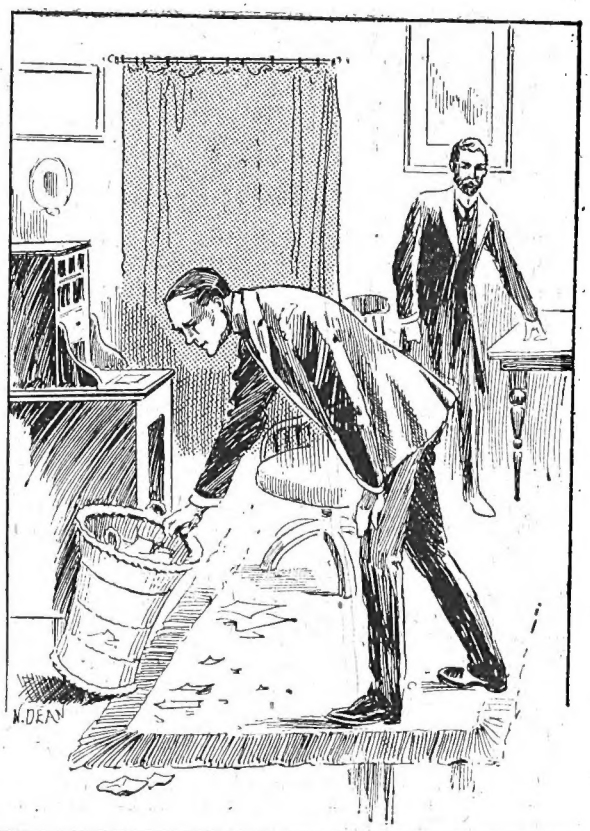
"He may be, or he may not be back for two or three days. Do you want to see him for anything important?"

Dr. Branksome fumbled with an album of photographs on a small table at his side. He did not want to discuss the matter of the letter with Mrs. Mortimer; it would necessitate so much explanation. He therefore dismissed the subject carelessly.

"Oh, my business will have to wait."

"You've no more news regarding the—the murder I suppose?" queried Mrs. Mortimer, changing the subject. "No new light on the affair."

"Nothing," the doctor replied, still idly turning over the leaves of the album; "nothing that is of any great im—— Oh, Good Heavens!"



Inspector Trench stepped nimbly towards a wastepaper basket standing near the desk.

Mrs. Mortimer rose in her chair at the doctor's exclamation.

"Why, what is the matter?" she asked concernedly.

For a moment Dr. Branksome did not speak, but sat rigid, staring fixedly at an inscription written on the first page of the album. Then, as the necessity for self-possession burst in upon his mind, he replied, with a faint attempt at a smile, snapping the album as he spoke:

"Pray excuse me, dear Mrs. Mortimer, but I had an awful twinge of neuralgia pain suddenly. I'm afraid I startled you. A thousand apologies."

Thus he slid over the matter, but a minute later he rose to go, pleading an engagement at the asylum.

Once in the open air, he mopped his perspiring brow.

"Great Heavens!" he murmured to himself solemnly, "I should never have thought of *her*. But that it's the same handwriting, I'd stake my life on. Poor Mortimer, he's in love with her. I see it all now. Mortimer took that letter to prevent my handing it to the police. Well, if it will save him any suffering, I'm glad he did, and I for one will never divulge my suspicions. And now he's gone to London to find her, I'll swear, and try to shield her from the law. What awful things do happen in this miserable world!"

He groaned aloud as he walked back towards the asylum.

"If my suspicions are correct," he said to himself presently, "I shall have to put the police off as much as possible for poor Gerald's sake. Poor chap, his must be a bitter load to bear."

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Hardly had he set foot in his apartments when a servant approached him.

"There is a gentleman waiting to see you, sir," the servant explained. "He won't give any name, but says his business with you is of the utmost importance."

"Show him in," replied Dr. Branksome, suspecting the true nature of his visitor's business.

A tall, well-built man of about forty was ushered into the room.

"I am Inspector Trench, of Scotland Yard," he observed quietly.

"Ha! pray be seated, inspector. You've come, of course, to find out all you can about this murder—a bad business, inspector, as it seems to me, a very bad business."

The detective bowed acquiescence, as one who would rather get to active business than waste time in discussion.

"I understood from the local police," he remarked quietly, "that you have to-day received an anonymous letter, inclosing the sum of twenty pounds for the burial of the murdered man."

The doctor bowed.

"That is so," he assented.

"I should like to see that letter."

Dr. Branksome shifted nervously in his chair.

"Inspector," he said, "it's extremely unfortunate, but the letter has been lost," and forthwith he plunged into a recital of the circumstances surrounding its disappearance. The detective listened quietly and respectfully to the end. Then he asked:

"Did you open the letter in this room when you received it."

"Yes," replied the doctor, wondering at the drift of the question.

"Ah, that's good!" ejaculated Inspector Trench; "then we shall probably find the envelope in here," and he stepped nimbly towards a waste-paper basket standing near the desk, on which his eyes had been fixed for the past few minutes.

Dr. Branksome's heart sank. The letter was missing and the valuable evidence it contained removed, but the envelope had been overlooked, and would be quite sufficient to establish identity of handwriting. Poor Gerald Mortimer, why didn't you think of this damning envelope.

"How stupid of me," said Dr. Branksome, striving hard to get a note of cheerfulness into his voice, "I never thought of the envelope."

"We do forget things of that sort sometimes," replied the detective, who was busy sorting the contents of the basket on the table. "Now then, doctor, which was it contained the missing letter?"

Branksome eyed the range of torn papers. The grey ribbed envelope was the one undoubtedly, but in the officer's appeal for assistance he thought he saw a way of throwing him off the trail. He eyed the envelopes for a moment, and then pointed to one which he knew had contained nothing more than a letter of inquiry regarding a patient.

"I think it's that one," he observed, wincing inwardly at his perversion of the truth.

"Ha, you *think* it's this one, doctor, but you're not sure. Then it will be safer for me to take the lot," and so saying the detective collected all the envelopes together and placed them in his pocket. Poor Dr. Branksome! you thought to do your friend a good turn, but, reviled as Scotland Yard is, its officers are not to be tricked by such simple means as you employed.

"I think you said that you left a Mr. Mortimer in the room just before the letter was lost," the officer inquired lightly.

"I did say so," replied the other, "merely so that you should know all I know."

"Of course, of course, merely that; there is no suggestion that Mr. Mortimer knows anything of the missing letter—of course."

"Exactly! Mr. Mortimer is a friend of mine, my oldest and dearest friend, in fact."

"Quite so, and therefore quite incapable of—quite so, quite so! Well, good evening, Dr. Branksome. It's a queer case, so little to go on you know, but we'll do our best. Good evening!" and the officer bowed himself out in the politest of fashions.

He filled his pipe as he walked along the asylum drive, passed a cheerful remark to the porter about the beauty of the night, and then paused, fifty yards away, to strike a match.

"Now, what's this Dr. Branksome's game?"

He put the question bluntly to himself, and pondered it as he puffed at his pipe.

"What's he trying to hide? Why does he pretend not to recognise the envelope? He's shielding this chap Mortimer—his oldest and dearest friend, that's what he's doing, and he's doing it very clumsily indeed. But why's he doing it at all? What does Mr. Mortimer know of the business, and why should he annex a letter that doesn't belong to him? Is he on the shielding tack too? Jack Trench," he concluded, still addressing himself, "you're hungry now, and you've got to get a steak across your chest. But when you've satisfied the inner man, you've got to get on the war path, that's what you've got to do, Jack."

* * * * *

"Now, how do I stand," soliloquised Inspector John Trench, late that night, as he sat in a private room of Mr. William Loppidge's hostelry in Moulstone village. "I've found out that Mr. Gerald Mortimer is sweet on Miss Nina Penhurst, the young lady who's run away, for no cause whatever, from a nice comfortable berth, and what's equally important, I find that supposing this envelope here" (and he indicated the grey ribbed covering previously mentioned) "contained the anonymous letter, why, then, Miss Nina Penhurst wrote it. For I'd swear these two handwritings are the same any day." And here he placed the envelope alongside a written order addressed to Mr. Seddon, the village butcher, and signed on behalf of Mrs. Mortimer, by "N. Penhurst."

"Mr. Gerald Mortimer's gone to London, I find, called up on unexpected business. It's merely a coincidence his following Miss Penhurst so soon, of course." Here the officer gave a little ironical snigger. "But it's a little more than a coincidence that the letter which the gentleman stole should be the identical one which the lady wrote. And young gents don't steal letters for nothing. But it's time you went to bed, Jack, you've to be up early in the morning. You've got to leave the pure, sweet air of Moulstone, and get back to grimy London again."

CHAPTER X.

Nina Penhurst has an Exciting Adventure.

In a small cottage, situated in the rural suburb of Roehampton, sat two women, busily sewing. One was old and the other young, and just as distant as their ages was an undeniable difference in their social position. The stout, roundness of face, the large hands coarsened by years of hard household work, stamped the elder woman as belonging to the old-fashioned servant class; while in the delicate-featured girl who sat opposite to her it was easy to recognise refinement and good breeding.

Although the latter on occasions would give unmistakable proofs of her industry with the needle, a close observer could not have failed to notice that her heart was not really in her work. For every now and then the expression of her eyes would seem to become fixed, the play of her fingers over her work would slacken gradually, until at length they would stop altogether.

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And then her eyes would take unto themselves a greyness and an aspect of deep thought, which for the time would seem to put years on to her life.

One of these fits of abstraction attracted the old woman's attention presently.

"There you go again, Miss Nina," she remarked, "forgetting your work, and thinkin', thinkin'. Why don't you try and cheer up a bit, dearie? I'm sure it's far too beautiful a day to be miserable. Look at the sun on the trees—it's lovely."

Nina Penhurst, whom the old lady addressed, looked up.

"I'm sure I ought to be happy here, Martha," she said with a sad smile. "Nothing to worry me, and always the dear face of my old nurse to look upon. But, somehow, I can't help thinking to-day. Martha," she added suddenly, "I want you to tell me all you know about Felix Cordelvin."

It was the old lady's turn to be surprised now.

"You are worrying too much about Felix Cordelvin, my dear," she said, "more than is good for you. Poor man! it's sad that he met with the end he did, but it's no good to fret and worry over it as you're doing."

"I'm not fretting," replied Nina, "I can't grieve, because, as I never saw him to my knowledge, I have no sense of personal loss. But I can't help thinking about the matter, because, after all, he was a relative."

"A relative!" repeated the old lady, with just a tinge of indignation in her tone. "Maybe he was, but distant enough in all conscience—third or fourth cousin, I can't say which. Mr. Anthony's as near a relative as you are, and he's rich; why didn't he see to the burial of Felix Cordelvin, instead of your having to part with——"

"Hush, Martha, dear!" interrupted Nina, "I sent quite of my own free will, feeling it to be the least I could do. I should have gone down to see him buried, but for reasons which I have already given you, I did not wish Mrs. Mortimer to see me or know of my whereabouts. As for my uncle Anthony, he would, I am sure, have buried his cousin had he been aware of the necessity. But you know the state of his mind!"

"Oh, yes, I know that!" assented old Martha Nainby, "and I don't blame him. It's Mr. Vanstone that I blame. He's got charge of the property; why didn't he see to it?"

"It's useless to speculate on that point, Martha, and it's useless to ask me. I understand Mr. Vanstone just as imperfectly as you do, and I like him as little as you."

"Which means that you don't like him at all then," snapped Martha vehemently. "He's your guardian, Miss Nina, leastways he was, and he's trustee for all your property; but, asking your pardon for the liberty, I think he's a rascal. Why ever didn't dear old Mr. Mark make a will like other people, and leave you to come into the money at twenty-one, instead of leaving it all in charge of Mr. Roderick Vanstone?"

"You forget, Martha, that great-uncle Mark's chief

She felt herself lifted up and swung twice backwards and forwards through the air.

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desire was to provide for his son Anthony. But there! I think we've talked quite enough, and as I don't feel much in the mood for needlework, I think I'll take a walk on the common. It's a lovely day, and I'll take my sketch-book out with me. If I'm to take pupils, I shall have to keep up my drawing, shan't I, Martha?"

Far away over in that corner of Wimbledon Common which is farthest from London, and which abuts on the Kingston Road, there lies tucked away in a hollow, a lake known as Queensmere. Framed by green banks, upon which stately pines grow, and upon which, in summer time, ferns flourish in lavish profusion, it makes a pretty picture. It is a bit of scenery which, come upon suddenly by the jaded Londoner, is apt to surprise by its quiet, seclusion, and unexpected beauty. For it looks to be like a bit of Cumberland—planed down, it is true—carried away on a freakish witch's broom and dumped down near to London, to give to weary town-dwellers an idea of what rural England has to offer them.

To this spot came Nina Penhurst on this January afternoon, three or four days after her hasty departure from Moulstone Manor House. Although the season was winter, the sun shone with such unusual power as well-nigh deluded out-of-door people into the belief that it was spring. Tempted by the warmth and the joy of the sunlight on the water, Nina sat down on a rustic bench near and prepared her sketch-book. But though she tried she could not concentrate her mind upon her drawing. Her pencil flitted absently over the paper for a few minutes, and then, as with the sewing, she fell once more into a fit of abstraction.

Vaguely her mind reviewed the events of the past few days; the murder of Felix Cordelvin, Gerald Mortimer's declaration of love, and her own sudden flight. A tear welled up from her heart as she thought of Gerald. What did he think of her now? Did he love her now?—now that she had so unceremoniously left his mother's roof? God knows, she loved him fondly, but he must never know that. Within her breast was a terrible secret, a secret she dare not divulge to Gerald Mortimer, but which must unquestionably prevent her from ever marrying. Better, then, that she should have run away as she had done, better for him, better for her, and——

"Carlo! come here, sir!"

The voice, a man's, broke in upon her thoughts from behind, and a strange feeling that she knew the voice filled her mind. At the same moment, she caught sight of a big retriever dog close by.

She started, and then obeying an irresistible impulse, looked round. Within twenty yards of her stood the man who had called out. He, too, affected surprise as he raised his soft felt hat.

"Miss Penhurst—is it possible?" he said, and advanced towards her with outstretched hand.

She dropped her hands resolutely to her side, and half-turned away, with set face.

"Cold as ever to me," the man said quietly, noting the action. "I had hoped that after nearly three months parting you might have changed."

She turned and looked him straight in the eyes.

"Mr. Vanstone," she said sternly, and with something like contempt in her look, "I must ask you not to refer to the past. I thought, indeed, it was fully understood that we were not to meet again."

"Ah! but you see," returned Stephen Vanstone, for it was he, "Providence seems to have conspired to upset so unsatisfactory a programme. May I take it as a good omen?"

A withering glance came out of her eyes, but she spoke no words.

"It is useless," he burst out, coming closer to her, "useless to scorn me as you are doing. At sight of you all the love of the past years is revived in me. As I look at you now, beautiful in your very wrath, I feel that life without you is a hopeless blank. Nina,"—he was striving now to infuse a softness into his voice that ill accorded with its natural harshness. "Nina, I beg you to try and forget that you hate me. Say that some day you may learn to love me."

He strove as he spoke to get possession of her hand. But she snatched it resolutely away as if stung.

"Mr. Vanstone!" she cried, and all her pent-up indignation and contempt seemed expressed in that cry. "If you are a gentleman, nay, if you have but one spark of manhood in you, you will leave me at once."

He recoiled a step at the very vehemence of her scorn; but a second later he recovered himself. An ugly look came into his eyes.

"Leave you!" he replied, "that I will never do. I have told you that I love you. You have scorned my love, have spurned it as if it were a thing of no account. I tell you you shall learn to love me yet."

"Leave me!" she repeated. "You do not know what you are saying."

He stepped forward again.

"Perhaps I don't!" he said in a strange, hollow tone; "perhaps I don't know what I am saying. Maybe, I am mad with love for you. I believe I am. Here, give me your hand! I'll make you listen to me!"

"I refuse to listen to you!"

"You jade! I'll make you. Your hand, I say, your hand in true lover fashion."

He laughed a cruel, hoarse laugh as he spoke, and forcibly seized her hand. There was a look as of a devil upon his face. He clasped her round the waist, she struggling helplessly in his cruel grip.

"Let me go!" She was shrieking now, her face white as snow.

"A kiss! I'm going to kiss you!"

She swung herself round as he uttered the words, and with a great effort released her hand. Then with all her force she struck him full in the mouth.

The force of the blow, and the realisation of the feelings which had prompted it, stung the man to fury. He seized her again, heedless now whether he hurt her or not. Then with a sudden wrench, he swung her round and dragged her forward. Before her startled eyes lay the cold waters of the lake, and to her affrighted senses there shot in the thought of what he was going to do. One more wild shriek she gave, and then she felt her feet leave the ground and her body lifted up and swung twice backwards and forwards through the air. The rippling waters of the lake seemed to pass out of sight, a fearful buzzing filled her ears, and then she knew no more.

(To be continued.)

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A Chance Meeting

The Righting of Two Love Affairs.

"Then it is all over between us?" said Alice in a dreary tone. She would like to have felt George's arm round her waist, and his face near hers whispering words of love to a willing listener; but she wouldn't have had him know this for the world, because George was clearly in the wrong and it was his place to make it up.

"I suppose it is," George repeated, trying to speak indifferently; how he longed to take her in his arms again, but she was in the wrong and he wasn't going to give in to her.

Alice put out her hand.

"Then I will wish you good-evening, Mr. Henson," she said with pronounced emphasis on the surname and just the slightest possible suspicion of a tremor in her voice.

"I will see you to your home, Miss Murphin," George replied, feeling that the resumption of the surname which they both intended to sound dignified was a farce, but a farce with a tragedy in it.

"You need not trouble," replied Alice, hoping all the time that George would trouble, since this would entail a last chance for reconciliation.

"Very well, if you are sure you don't mind," George returned, resolved to be as independent as she, however great the cost.

So the two foolish young lovers parted.

For three days they waited, avoiding each other with the utmost caution. Then George met Miss Amies, a fair-haired, blue-eyed, sweet little thing at a party. George fancied that he had made an impression, and a bright thought struck him.

"Now we shall see what will happen," he soliloquised, "when Alice finds that I can get another girl."

What George expected to happen is a query; he did not know himself, so it is impossible for us to tell. Anyway he went in for it hot, and stifled his heart by saying that the world thought Miss Amies the prettier of the two.

Yet comparisons would spring up, and always to the advantage of Alice; he liked the shape of her hand best, or was it the way in which she walked? Or was it that he preferred brown eyes to blue? The fact was, George loved Alice and could not love another; so he told himself that he was only flirting to bring Alice to her senses, though what he expected Alice to do when she came to her senses is a second query.

Well, the first time George took Miss Amies for a walk he contrived to pass Alice's house, but he could not see her at the window, which was disappointing. Also he learnt on this auspicious occasion that he might call Miss Amies "Annie," which ought to have elevated him a good deal, but somehow it didn't. Anyway, "Annie" began with the same letter as "Alice," which in some inexplicable way gave a slight consolation to his bleeding heart.

On a second occasion George was more fortunate, for they nearly ran into Alice at the corner of the street; with one swift glance she recognised him and coloured slightly. However, Alice recovered immediately, and, as George took off his hat, acknowledged him with a slight bow.

George smiled inanely, which he believed was a smile of lofty indifference, but which wasn't; after which he walked onward, with his head a little higher, his step a little longer, his heart beating very much faster, and feeling very much prouder of himself. What would Alice do? George tried to guess as he lay on his back in bed that night.

Perhaps she would write him a conciliatory note; he even thought out an answer:

"Dear Miss Murphin,

Since you acknowledge that you were in the wrong, I am quite willing to overlook it, and will call for you as usual, to-morrow night."

No, that was too impatient; he would leave out the "quite" and substitute "Thursday" for "to-morrow." But what if she should not write? Perhaps she would loiter about the office at which he worked and meet his careless glance with a supplicating look. He would not take it too easy; unconditional surrender was what he required, then he would freely forgive her and behave with the same kindness as before. And George almost shed tears as he thought of his own forgiving nature.

Alice resolved to act as she dashed the hot tears from her eyes that night.

For nearly a week George saw nothing of his former sweetheart; he grew each day more restless and irritable, and derived little benefit from his walks with Annie. One day, as George was coming home from the office, he saw Alice standing at a shop window which she was perfectly aware that he must pass. George passed, uncertain as to what would happen. Of course, this was a desire on her part to lure him back to love again. Things were coming right, but George required "absolute surrender." At that moment Alice glanced round; she treated her former lover to a cold glance of recognition and the slightest possible inclination of the head.

"That won't do, young woman," was George's mental comment, but he stopped at the next window and waited for Alice to come forward, and make it up. But Alice did not come forward, the position was embarrassing. Then a young man, tall, dark, and of good deportment, stepped from the shop, and Alice took his arm, as naturally as she had formerly taken George's.

"I am awfully sorry to have kept you waiting so long, dear, but the fellow was so stupid——"

This much George heard as he tore away. He was in an awful rage. He had not conceived that Alice could play the same game as himself. He had left things to right themselves, but instead they had gone to rack and ruin. George rushed home and spent half the night in parading up and down the room, and then he sat down and scribbled:

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"Dear Alice,

If I may call you by that name, I am sorry we ever fell out, though, of course, you will be willing to admit that you were mostly in the wrong. Anyway, dearest, I should be glad to let bygones be bygones. Please write at once and say that you are ready to make it up."

The answer came next evening, and George hung over the dear handwriting on the envelope. After all he wished he had not been so impatient, if he had waited he might have gained a more glorious victory; in fact, this was hardly a victory at all, it was almost a defeat. Then he tore open the letter.

"Dear George,

I am sorry I can't comply with the suggestions contained in your letter, but I showed it to Ernest and he says that he has no objection to you considering yourself one of my most intimate friends; you may still call me Alice if you like, Ernest says. It may be some consolation for you to know that I was first attracted to Ernest by the manner in which he twisted the ends of his moustache, the same identical way as you have—in fact, Ernest is a good deal like you in many ways, but without your bad temper. As for our quarrel, I have forgotten what it was about, so cannot be expected to say who was in the wrong, but we must both confess that it was Providential. Do not let this trouble spoil your life.

Your affectionate friend,

Alice."

It is impossible to describe George's mind; he tore the letter to pieces, and he tore the pieces to pieces, and he tore the pieces of the pieces to pieces. Then he gathered up the fragments, placed them in a tin lid and ignited the whole, a funeral pyre of past hopes and affections.

Could George have seen the hot tears which welled in Alice's eyes as she indited that epistle? Could he have seen how her heart throbbed and beat with love for him and him alone? But Alice was proud and angry and she had accepted the offer of another, so anyway George's letter came too late.

And she ran all the way to the post to dispatch the letter before the love which she bore George should overcome her anger and become dictatorial. Then she ran back to her own room and fastened the door and cried, and cried, and cried.

The next evening George called for Annie, and during their walk together asked her to become his wife.

"Before I accept your offer I must in honour confess that I have loved before and experienced a different emotion towards another from any feeling I have for yourself. Last year, while crossing from New York, I was thrown much in the company of a certain gentleman, but what I interpreted as love was merely gallantry on his part, for though I was foolish enough to give him my address I have never since heard from him."

"Oh, that doesn't signify in the slightest!" George returned.

"Then I am afraid you fail to understand my meaning," said Annie with a slight tremor. "I respect you, yes, I believe I feel also a certain kind of affection, but not that, shall I call it fascination?"

"Oh, I quite understand," George broke in, "and will repeat my offer. As for a lot of love and sentimental nonsense, I don't believe in it."

"If those are really your sentiments, I accept your offer and will do my utmost to make you happy."

It was quite a month later, when one evening George and Annie strolled into a café. It was not until they were seated and George had given the order, that he glanced up and noticed the couple opposite; as he did so, he paled a little, set his teeth hard and said something under his breath. Alice, for it was she and her new betrothed, glanced up at the same moment, and their eyes met. A distressed look came into her face in answer to his haughty stare; she turned instantly to her companion.

"Ernest," she cried, "take me away, I don't feel well!"

But Ernest was staring with all his might at the new comers and he answered in a mechanical tone:

"Yes, my dear, let us get out of this at once."

George had also turned to his lady-love, trying vainly to look debonair, and was astonished to find that she was trembling all over with emotion.

"Yes. I know her," he said savagely, fancying that he had divined what was passing through the girl's mind, "but you have no cause to trouble on her account."

Annie neither understood nor heeded his words; as the other pair were passing, she rose and extended her hand.

"Ernest," she said quietly, "after the very enjoyable passage we spent together we may at least meet as friends."

"No!" he answered without accepting the proffered hand and flashing his dark eyes upon the girl, "that time we spent together demands that we shall meet as more or less than friends. Why did you not answer my letter?"

"Letter! What letter?" she faltered.

"Strange forgetfulness, considering the contents," said the young man bitterly. Then a sudden light began to break upon him. "Annie, tell me, did you not receive the letter?"

"I have received no letter," replied the girl, "we have both been deceived."

Then George sprang up fiercely.

"You have robbed me of one girl," he cried, "you have dared to read my private letter, you shall not have both!"

"No, George, that about showing Ernest your letter was only a fib," faltered Alice.

"Had we not better talk it over quietly outside? There seems to be some mistake and we are exciting a good deal of attention here," suggested Ernest.

So they all four went out, Ernest and George together.

"Were you Miss Murphin's first young man?" queried Ernest.

"I was, and she threw me over for you," said George savagely.

"But she told me that she could never give me her heart, that she loved another, meaning you, but that you had quarrelled and neither would give in, but she respected me and would try to be a good wife."

"Why, that is just what Annie said to me!" cried George.

"And you love Alice? Yes, you do. I can read it in your face."

"Well, but she has treated me very badly!"

"Not so badly as you deserved if you had looked at her like that. This is what she said when I told her about my former attachment: 'Both our lives are a failure, however we look at it: let's make the best of a bad job, and even though we don't love we shall sympathise for each other, since we have both known a similar sorrow.'"

"Ernest," cried George impulsively, "let's swop!"

Then they joined the ladies.

A. S. M.

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The General's Gloves.

By LEVIN CARNAC.

"General Peter Golitzin, Chief of the Third Section, was taken ill at a ball given by Princess Willewald at her palace on the Gorokhovaya-Ulitza on Thursday night, and expired shortly before midnight yesterday, after an illness of less than forty-eight hours. The cause of death is stated as gouty affection of the heart. It is expected that in consideration of his own and his father's great abilities and faithful service, his Majesty will be pleased to appoint Colonel Nicholai, the deceased General's only son, and long-trusted assistant, to the vacant post."

Such was the official account of the death of one of the most devoted and merciless men who ever commanded that terrible official organisation which is known and dreaded by the Russians as the Third Section. It was published in the *Grashdanin* and the *Novoe Vremya* under the official sanction, and there was supposed to be an end of the matter, so far as the curiosity of all loyal subjects of the Czar was concerned.

That it was not true did not concern the public at large, but the fact did very intimately concern two sets of people as wide asunder as the East and the West. These were the inner circle of officialism on the one hand, and the Nihilist organisation on the other.

Among the former the death of General Golitzin produced a sensation which bordered closely on a panic, for the horror of the assassination of the Emperor Alexander II. was still fresh in the minds of men, the extraordinary precautions and almost barbarously stringent regulations made in the hour of terror, were still in force, and yet the invisible hand of Nihilist revenge had pierced the hedge of bayonets and the closely-drawn cordon of police and spies, and had struck down the Chief of the Third Section, and then vanished without leaving so much as a suspicion behind it.

The fact which was suppressed by the *Grashdanin* and the *Novoe Vremya*, if indeed their editors ever knew it, was that General Golitzin was murdered, or "removed," according to the different phrasecologies of his friends and his enemies.

Even although the very circumstance of his death has long ceased to be a topic of conversation in the drawing-rooms of St. Petersburg, and though the officials have done their best to forget a mystery they were never able to solve, the true story of his death has never been told until now.

On the 3rd of September, 1879, Stanislas Lobanoff, Junior Professor in the Faculty of History at the Imperial University, published a very able monograph on the Inner History of the Times of Catherine II. Although there was nothing in the essay that could be twisted into a cause for prosecution it excited the displeasure both of the Court and the Bureaucracy, and thenceforward its author was a marked man, in other words a suspect, and to be a suspect in Russia is merely a preparatory graduation for imprisonment in a fortress or exile in Siberia.

When Alexander II. was murdered a year and a half later Stanislas Lobanoff was one of the hundreds of suspects who were swept into the official net, and he was one of those who never escaped.

Among a pile of manuscripts found in his room, were some which in the eyes of the police bore the plainest testimony to his revolutionary opinions, but what settled his fate was the finding of a letter from his father, Michael Lobanoff, in London, which contained a postscript in cipher which the police were unable to make out, and which he refused to translate.

It did not seem much on the strength of which to send a man of such brilliant promise to a living grave in Siberia, but in the eyes of Peter Golitzin, a man who hated the very names of learning and enlightenment with the blind hatred of a semi-savage covered with a thin veneer of civilisation, it was enough, and so the young professor was exiled by administrative process, and fell dead in his chains as the convict train to which he belonged was crossing the ice of Lake Baikal in the following March.

When he signed the order for Lobanoff's exile, the Chief of the Third Section knew that he was sending the lover of his orphan niece to a fate darker than death, but this knowledge, so far from influencing him to mercy, inspired him with a positive pleasure, for the idea that his niece and his sister's heiress should marry a beggarly professor of history, and, worst of all, a man of learning and advanced political ideas, was something worse than hateful to him.

Added to this, he had other views for Vera Matieff. He knew that his son Nicholai had been in love with her ever since he had left the military school, and a marriage between the cousins, though nominally forbidden by the Orthodox Church, could still be arranged by one who stood so high as he did in the favour of the omnipotent Czar.

So he sent Stanislas Lobanoff to his death in Siberia without a thought of the terrible injustice of his fate, or of the effect the monstrous sentence might produce upon the mind of the girl who loved the brilliant young professor with a passionate devotion of which Golitzin had not the slightest comprehension.

Vera herself gave no outward sign of the mental agony which her lover's fate inflicted upon her. She knew that it was hopeless, and that, so far as she was concerned, the grave had already closed over him when he left the central convict *depôt* at Moscow. What had been love and hope now became hate and longing for revenge. Her uncle, whom as a girl she had always looked upon with fear and dislike, she regarded, now that sorrow had changed the girl into a woman, with a

loathing and ever-watchful hate alike impossible and incomprehensible to anyone but a Russian.

A Russian woman can love with the passion of a Spaniard and the constancy of a German, and she can hate with the ferocity of an Italian and the patience of a Fleming. From the day that she knew she must henceforth mourn her lover as dead she lived with a single object in life, and that was the punishment of the man she looked upon as his murderer.

From hatred of her uncle to detestation of the system which was incarnated in him was but a step, and from this it was but a step further into Nihilism itself, and, as it happened, Vera Matieff was just the human material of which the most dangerous and relentless conspirators are made.

She recognised at once that her surest and shortest road to the most complete vengeance for what she looked upon as the murder of her lover and the ruin of her own life's happiness lay through the confidence of his official murderer. She therefore accepted his fate with well-simulated resignation, apparently believing that he had really been guilty of conspiracy against the Czar and confessing, to her uncle's unconcealed delight, that that was quite enough to prevent her ever thinking of him again, save as one who had gained her affection under false pretences.

More than this, she forced herself to look with less and less displeasure upon the advances of Nicholai, and at length confessed, not altogether insincerely, that some day, when the bitterness of her disappointment in her first love had worn off, she might be brought to look upon him as her future husband.

Thus she succeeded in gaining the absolute confidence both of her uncle and her cousin, and also managed to make herself so useful to the former in his most confidential official work that he at last permitted her to copy for him documents which he had hitherto permitted no eyes but his own and his son's to see, before they were submitted to the approval of the Czar.

It was in this way that she gained sufficient knowledge of the police secret cipher and her uncle's private code, to enable her to get a clear comprehension of the inner working of that frightful terrorism which lies like a blight over all Russian Society, from the moujik to the noble. This knowledge afterwards became in her hands a potent instrument of indirect revenge, and, by the horrors which it revealed to her, it also fixed her in her resolution to join the Nihilists.

About two years after the death of her lover she paid a visit to London with Princess Willewald, a cousin of her uncle's, and it was not long before she found an opportunity of communicating with her dead lover's father, Michael Lobanoff, who was carrying on business as a jeweller and diamond merchant in Martin Street, Holborn.

While she suspected that he had some connection with the Nihilist organisation, all that she actually knew was that he had left Russia several years before to avoid arrest as a suspect, and had been living ever since in exile. She felt that the bond existing between them rendered him the only man to whom she could safely confide her hopes and plans of revenge for the murder of her lover and his son.

If he proved to be a Nihilist, then she would give her allegiance to the Brotherhood through him; if not, no doubt he could still bring her into contact with those who would serve the same purpose.

Her card secured her instant admission to his private office, and as he rose from his seat to greet her she saw a white-haired, pale-skinned, keen-eyed man of about seventy. In reality Michael Lobanoff was barely sixty, but those who have felt the heavy hand of Russian tyranny usually look older than their years.

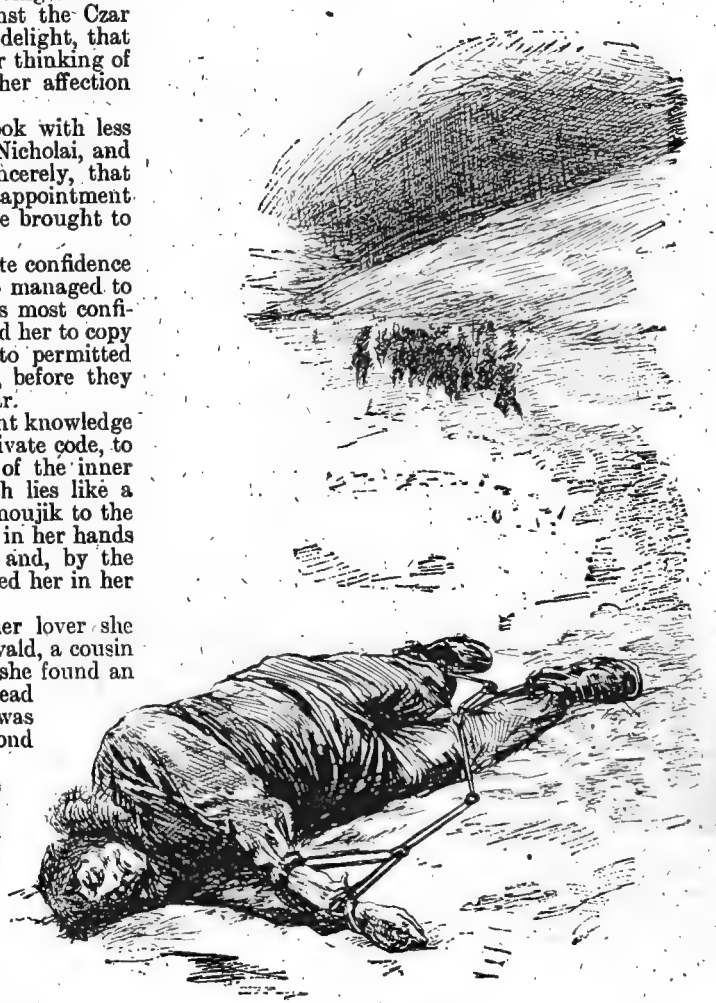
"You are welcome, Vera Matieff," he said, in Russian. "I knew you were in London with the Princess, but I scarcely dared hope that I should have been honoured with a visit. Does your jewel-case want replenishing, or have you come to me for a more serious reason?"

At the last words he fixed his clear grey eyes on hers, and she returned the glance steadily as she replied:

"For a more serious reason; one so serious that I I fear we cannot talk about it here."

"Ach!" he said. "I see. You have not forgotten, then?"

"No, nor yet forgiven. You understand, of course?"



He fell dead in his chains as the convict train to which he belonged was crossing the ice of Lake Baikal.

"Yes, I understand perfectly. Come upstairs and I will find you a place where you can speak without fear."

He moved towards an inner door, and opened it as he spoke. As she passed through he told his shopman that he was not to be disturbed for any purpose, and then he led the way upstairs to a small, cosily-furnished back room on the third floor. There, after closing a door which shut without the slightest noise save the click of a spring-lock, he gave her a chair, and said:

"There, sit down, and speak freely, for these walls have no ears, and this window no eyes."

She glanced up to the window as he spoke, and noticed that it was double, after the Russian fashion, and that the outside panes of glass were frosted.

"Now," he continued, seating himself opposite to her, "speak, and tell me what I can do for you?"

"Can you translate that?" she said, taking a little slip of paper from the bosom of her dress and handing it to him. He unfolded it, opened his eyes just a trifle wider, and then handed it back, saying:

"No. I think I know what it is, but there are only two men in the world who can read it."

"And they are?"

"Peter Golitzin, Chief of the Third Section, and his master, the Tyrant himself."

"Ah, then you recognise the private cipher! Now let us see if you can read this one?" and she handed him another slip. The moment his eyes fell upon it he rose from his seat and came to her, and, putting his hand upon her shoulder, said:

"Vera Matieff, that is a dangerous possession for the niece of Peter Golitzin to carry about with her! Why have you brought it to me, and how did you get it?"

"I will tell you when I know whether you can read it," she said quietly; "and if you will read it to me I will read the other one to you."

"What, you!" he cried, recoiling a couple of steps from her. "How is it possible——"

"Most things are possible to a Russian woman who has learnt how to hate," replied Vera quietly. "I have been acting as confidential secretary to my uncle for more than a year now, and little by little the clue to the system dawned upon me, and then a few weeks' work enabled me to read it.

"This is an extract from my uncle's private diary which no one else ever sees except the Czar—and myself.

"He has no idea that I know it, and so he has not been afraid to leave me alone in his study with it. It contains some strange secrets, I can tell you, and this is one of them. That other slip which I want you to read was also taken from my uncle's study. I can't read it, and that's why I want you to do so."

Michael Lobanoff hesitated for a few moments, looking searchingly at her the while. Then, apparently satisfied, he looked at the paper and read:

"Boris Paskof is responsible for the information given to the Governor of Tver which led to the visitation of November 29th. He is now in St. Petersburg, and this is to warn you to keep watch upon him, and await a favourable opportunity."

"So," she said, rising and facing him with a smile, "you can read the Nihilist cipher, therefore there may be some truth in this. Listen." Then she read from the other extract of paper:

"Michael Lobanoff, father of Stanislas Lobanoff, exiled to Siberia by administrative process, follows the calling of jeweller and merchant of gems at No. 13, Martin Street, in the west-central of London. He is believed to be an important member of the Nihilist organisation, and has received known Nihilists at his house. He is to be closely watched by the London agents. If suspicions are proved correct sufficient incriminatory matter is to be deposited on his premises to secure his extradition, on a charge of forging one hundred rouble notes on the Imperial Bank. Edward Smithson, who serves in his shop, is to be trusted."

"Now what do you think of that?" she said, as she finished reading the cipher.

"I think you have come here to save me from a great danger," he said, stretching out both his hands towards her. "You have done it for the sake of Stanislas. You would save the father of the man you have loved from the same fate that he suffered."

"Yes, and I would do more than that," she said, putting her hands in his. "His blood still asks for vengeance; his murderer is still alive, and rich and honoured——"

"And your uncle!" interrupted Michael, still keeping his eyes fixed on hers.

"Yes, my uncle," she said. "But what of that? Do you suppose I cannot hate him for Stanislas' sake?"

"I see you do hate him," said Michael. "Your hate is written on your fair face and rings in your voice. I am satisfied. You have done me a service which compels me to trust you absolutely. What do you want me to do in return?"

"You are a Nihilist," she said. "I wish to be received into the Brotherhood, and I ask you to be my sponsor."

A smile moved the thin, nervous lips of the old man as he replied:

"Yes, I am what you say, and I will be your sponsor. Peter Golitzin's suspicions are correct, but they fall short of the truth. The father of one of his victims is head of the organisation in London, and that means that he is Executive Chief of the Brotherhood. You shall take the oaths within forty-eight hours, and I can promise you a high place in our councils."

"All that I can do I will do, and I think I can do much. Can you tell me now, or must I wait till I am admitted, to know, why my—why Peter Golitzin has escaped execution so long? It seems strange that you should not have exacted vengeance before this."

"It is not so easy even for me to reach the Chief of the Third Section. It would be almost as easy to reach the Tyrant himself; and more than that, my vengeance, when it falls, shall be complete. It will not be satisfied by his mere removal. He has killed my son, and by the hand of his own son I will kill him, and by no other! I cannot do that yet, but it will not be very long, I hope, before I shall be able to give the command that he will not dare to disobey. If he does, I will have his life first and then another hand—perhaps yours—shall take his father's."

While he was speaking Vera's heart stood still with wonder and a new-born horror.

"What do you mean?" she said, with white, trembling lips. "How can you make Nicholai Golitzin kill his father? Is he one of us—I mean, of you? But no, that surely is impossible."

"It was until half an hour ago, but it is not impossible now. There is no need for you to tell me that Nicholai Golitzin loves you, and has loved you all his life. You know that he would do anything to win you, and your first task when you join the Brotherhood shall be to win him over to us.

"He is anything but the brute his father is, and his real views are liberal, though he dare not show them. This is well-known to us. Widows marry again, why

should you not marry him after he has taken the oath? The rest you can leave to me."

"What!" she said. "I must make him a Nihilist so that you may make him a parricide, and then I am to marry him. No, Michael Lobanoff, not even to avenge Stanislas would I consent to that. I would sooner kill Peter Golitzin with my own hand. I will not take the oaths."

"You must," he replied coldly. "You have gone too far to go back. One does not play with Nihilism as with a popular craze. If you wish to leave London alive you will leave it as one of us, and, once one of us, you will learn to obey orders. You have come here of your own free will, you have given me your confidence and have won mine in return, and your fate is as fixed as that of Edward Smithson, who will be found dead in the Thames within a week. It is a matter of obedience or death, and you will choose obedience."

Michael Lobanoff's judgment was correct. There was no going back for Vera. She had walked into the toils open-eyed, but only then did she see in its true colours the hideous conspiracy to which the rest of her life must now be devoted. Whether she took the oaths or not, obedience or death were the only alternatives before her, and so it came to pass that she returned to Russia a Nihilist, committed soul and body to the work of the Brotherhood.

Gradually she became accustomed, now that the irrevocable step was taken, to the new conditions of her life, and reconciled herself to the prospect before her, saving only her share in the fearful crime which was to satisfy the vengeance of Michael Lobanoff. Though she could never love another man as she had loved Stanislas she was so far touched by Nicholai's long and unswerving devotion to her, and his patience in waiting until the old wound was healed, that if marry she must, then she would choose him above all other men for her husband.

So, too, she believed her uncle worthy of death. She knew he was doomed, and if the Chief had sent her the order to kill him she would have obeyed. But she shrank with unutterable horror from the task of turning his own son's hand against him, and of living as the wife of a man whose soul was stained with his father's blood.

Yet there was no way apparent out of the terrible situation that Michael Lobanoff's hate and ingenuity had created round her. If she failed to convert Nicholai, her failure would be taken as treason and disobedience, and she would either be killed or betrayed to the Government in such fashion that not even her uncle's interest could save her, and, for all she knew, where she had failed some other woman might succeed, and she would, after all, suffer for nothing.

There was nothing for it but to go on. To go back was not only useless, but inevitably fatal. So she devoted herself to her task, always hoping, even against hope, that some solution of the difficulty would present itself before the time came for the crisis which she dreaded.

Not a little to her surprise, she found, when she came to sound Nicholai on political subjects, that his real opinions were very different from those which he acted upon as the servant of the Czar. Like herself, the fearful work of the Third Section was fast sickening him, and preparing him for the choice which she must soon put before him—the choice between becoming a Nihilist and her husband, or denouncing her as a traitor to the Government.

While she was deliberating as to how she should do this, chance did it for her. One night, when her uncle was at Tsarkoe Selo in attendance on the Czar, Nicholai came unexpectedly into the private study, and found her copying a dispatch written in the cipher which was used by the Chief of the Section in communicating with his subordinates.

Nicholai knew this cipher, though he did not know his father's code, and it was impossible for him not to suspect her object in copying that dispatch.

"What are you copying that for, Vera? Do you know that that is treason, even in you?" he said sternly, pointing to the paper.

"So you have discovered me! Very well. You have only anticipated what I was going to tell you. Yes, it is treason, and I know it. I was copying the dispatch to send a translation to the Nihilist Club at Novgorod, so that they might be prepared.

"Yes, I know what you are going to say. That means that I am a Nihilist myself. So I am. Now you have caught me red-handed. Will you denounce me, or——"

"Most things are possible to a Russian woman who has learnt how to hate," replied Vera quietly.

"Or what?"

"Or marry me," she said, as a rosy wave flowed upwards from her throat to her brow, heightening the beauty of her face until it seemed irresistible in his eyes.

As she spoke she held out her hands towards him with a gesture half-inviting, half-appealing. For a moment he stood amazed and irresolute. Then, with a swift movement, he put her hands aside, clasped her in his arms, and said, between the kisses that he rained upon her upturned face:

"Denounce you! Sooner would I go to the mines myself; besides, I believe I am half a Nihilist at heart myself. "So I will marry you, Batiushkla!"

"But if you marry me you must not be half a Nihilist," she said, stealing her arm up round his neck. "You must be a whole one, as I am, for I have devoted my soul and my life to the cause of Freedom, and you must do the same, or do your duty to the Czar and send me to the mines."

"If you go to the mines I will go too," he said, kissing her again. "But before that we will be married."

And so it came about that the son of the Chief of the Third Section joined that society of conspirators which, for a quarter of a century, has never been without its representatives in the immediate neighbourhood of the Russian throne.

Nicholai's father received the news of their betrothal with the highest pleasure. He had been right after all in his belief that the best thing that he could do with her student-lover was to send him to his death. She had forgotten him, and now the two families and the two fortunes would be united as he had always wished them to be.

The permission of the Czar to the union was obtained, and three months after the betrothal the wedding was celebrated in the Cathedral of St. Peter and St. Paul, Nicholai having taken the oaths which bound him to the Nihilists three days before. They went for their honeymoon to Paris, and when they had been there a fortnight the blow which Vera lived in agonising dread of fell.

One night, after they had returned from the opera, Nicholai found a man waiting to see him on urgent business. He took him into his smoking-room, and ten minutes later he rejoined his wife, carrying a little slip of paper between his thumb and finger. He was white to the lips, and his eyes were starting out of their sockets with terror.

"Look at that!" he said, in a hoarse choking whisper, as he held the paper with trembling hands before her eyes. "Look at that. My God, I see it all now! This is why you made yourself the price of my treason. Look at the name it is signed with—Michael Lobanoff, Chief of the Executive, the father of Stanislas, your lover! This is the revenge of a fiend, not of a man, and you are a fiend too, to have lent yourself to it.

"Read it: 'Peter Golitzin, Chief of the Third Section, is to be removed within one month from the date hereof, and Nicholai Golitzin is charged with the execution of this order.'

"I will not do it, I tell you! Bad as he is, he is still my father. I will kill myself before I raise my hand against him. I would kill you first, for you deserve it; but I have loved you too well, and I cannot. But if I don't, you will kill yourself, won't you? Speak!"

"Look at that!" he said in a hoarse, choking whisper, as he held the paper before her eyes. "Look at that!"

He gripped her roughly by the arm as he uttered the last word. She looked up at him with fear and horror in her eyes, strove twice to force some words between her white, parched lips, and then, with a low gasping cry, dropped senseless at his feet.

Four days after that there came a summons from St. Petersburg recalling Nicholai to his duties in consequence of a new conspiracy which had just been discovered among the students of the medical school. The evening before they set out Vera had a long *tête-à-tête* conversation with a Russian lady who was one of the bright particular stars of the foreign colony in Paris just then. She was also a member of the Paris Nihilist circle, and to her Vera told a portion of the story of the fearful situation in which her husband was placed.

"There is only one way out of it, my dear," said Countess Anna Radinsky, when she had heard the story. "Your esteemed uncle must die a natural death before the month is up. The only way to safely disobey the orders of the Chief is to make it impossible for them to be executed. You understand what I mean?"

"Yes," replied Vera, "I understand. There is no

other way, for Nicholai could not do it without being discovered, and then he would be executed, and I should be sent to the mines as a suspect, or end my days in Petropaulovski or Schlusseburg."

The result of this interview was that Vera took back with her to St. Petersburg a little packet of white, harmless-looking powder that no one save an expert could have told from pulverised chalk.

Two or three days after their arrival Princess Willewald gave a ball at her palace on the Gorokhovaya-Ulitza in honour of the home-coming of the bride and bridegroom. As their own house was not ready, in consequence of their unexpected return, General Golitzin gave them a suite of apartments in his residence.

In addition to her duties as private secretary, Vera had also been accustomed to look after her uncle's wardrobe for him, and to see that everything was ready for him to put on when he was going out to any function which necessitated full dress. One thing he was very particular about was his gloves.

He had singularly small white hands for a Russian, and he was very proud of them, and the quality and fit of his gloves was a matter of considerable solicitude. Vera, well aware of this little weakness of his, had brought him a dozen pairs of the finest white kid gloves that Paris could produce, and when he came to dress for the Princess's ball, he found a pair of these lying upon his dressing-table all ready for him to put on, skilfully stretched with the glove stretchers, and slightly dusted inside with powdered chalk, so that they might go on easily.

When they met in the hall to get into their carriage he thanked his niece for them, and told her that he had never had a pair of gloves that went on so easily or that fitted him so perfectly. The ball was a brilliant success up to a little before one in the morning, and then the festivities were brought to a sudden stop by General Golitzin fainting in the midst of a quadrille.

A doctor, who was dancing in the same set, at once examined him and pronounced the cause as affection of the heart, possibly from gout. He was taken home insensible, and towards morning was restored to consciousness. Twelve hours later he had another seizure, and after remaining in a state of coma for nearly eight hours, became conscious and gasped out feebly:

"My heart! my heart!" and died.

By the Emperor's order a post-mortem examination was made, and the physicians who conducted it were amazed to find that his heart was in a perfectly healthy condition, and showed no traces of gouty affection. The exact cause of his death was never known save to two people, and they kept each other's counsel well.

Nicholai Golitzin did not fill his father's position, as the *Grashdanin* and *Novoe Vremya* prophesied. The Emperor offered it to him, but on the plea of the terrible shock which his father's incomprehensible death had caused, both to himself and his wife, he obtained permission to decline it and to travel abroad for two years.

Nicholai and Vera went straight to London and Vera made one more call at the house in Martin Street, Holborn. Her husband never knew what passed between her and the Chief, but if she had not been able to give him a piece of paper containing a formal acquittal of all negligence in regard to the order to remove General Golitzin, the world would have been startled by revelations which would have set Europe in a blaze and crippled the activity of the Nihilists for years to come. As it was Europe never knew the avalanche that was held back from falling upon it by a single woman.

THE ROMANCE OF AN ARTIFICIAL MAN.

How Amanda Perkins was Lost.

Robert Barracks was a sincere, though highly artificial man—that is to say, he was nothing of a hypocrite, in spite of the fact that he had one false eye, a wooden leg, an auburn wig, an artificial larnyx, not to mention five very handsome sets of teeth, which he wore on different occasions. The only act of deception of which Robert Barracks had ever been guilty was that he had concealed from the fair Amanda Perkins, with whom he was deeply in love, the undoubted fact that he had one eye, one leg, a head of hair, one larynx, and no end of pearly white teeth in the grave.

Barracks had met Miss Perkins exclusively by moonlight, proposed by moonlight, and had been accepted by moonlight. Amanda firmly believed that her Robert was a perfect specimen of mature manhood, and Barracks had permitted her so to believe, rather than confess that a respectable minority of his being was dead and buried.

Alas for trusting woman and deceitful man, murder will out! It happened early in September last that Barracks had laid in a winter supply of legs, eyes, teeth, and locks and was fully prepared for the exigencies of life for one year to come, at the very least, and felt ready to call upon the fair object of his affections, and by the soft light of the flickering log to ask Miss Perkins to "name the day." "I will drop Amanda a line," quoth he, "and tell her to expect me this evening at 9.30."

And he sat down and wrote Amanda to that effect, addressed the envelope, sealed it, and posted it. As nine o'clock struck Robert dressed for his call, and precisely at 9.30 he rung the bell of Miss Perkins' house.

"Miss Perkins is not in," said the answering flunkey, "but she requested me to hand you this note."

"Thanks," said Robert, tearing the envelope from the note and reading, half aloud and half to himself:

"Robert Barracks Esq.

Dear Sir—All is over between us. I find you are false—false to the world, false to me. Do not try to see me more. I can never be yours.

Amanda Perkins.

Inclosed please find proofs of your falseness.—A.P."

With a mad sob Robert Barracks dashed down the steps, and, rushing to his apartments as fast as his artificial leg would permit, threw himself upon his bed.

"I am lost!" he whispered hoarsely; for before him were the proofs which Amanda had inclosed. They were in this form:

July 1, 1901.

Robert Barracks, Esq.

To the Universal Furnishing Co. Dr.

June 1.	One false leg, mahogany, nickel knee, decorated calf	£ 5
„	One gross blue eyes, variegated pupils, agate finish	10
„	Repairing knee-pan on rosewood limb, two new toes, and alteration of instep	2
June 5.	Three sets pearl-finish teeth, full jewelled ...	15
„	Four heads of auburn hair	10
„	Repairs to larynx	1
	Total	£43

Poor Robert! He had been guilty of that fatal error, of mixing up his love letters and his bills payable.

M. Y.

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Entertaining the Minister.

"THERE's a go!" muttered John Sanscript under his breath, last Saturday, as he poked up the fire in the parlour grate. "There's a go! The wife has gone and invited her minister to dine, and I'm to entertain him when he comes while she dishes up.

"Now I ain't used to clergymen, and no doubt I'll make a mess of it. Still, I'm not so ignorant after all. It's been a long while since I went to Sunday School, but I recollect some of the things we learnt. There goes the bell. I'll bet that's him."

Sanscript cleared his throat, walked into the hall, and opened the door.

A pale, cadaverous-looking young man with long hair, watery eyes, high cheek-bones, large mouth, Roman nose, and clad in a suit of shiny black, bowed and smiled at the master of the house most benignly. Under his arm he carried a large book, and Sanscript, of course, knew what that was. Grasping the visitor by the hand, John pulled him into the hall with cordial intent, and, continuing to shake and squeeze, said:

"My dear, sir, this is indeed a pleasure. We've been expecting you. Come into the parlour."

With bewilderment written all over his face, the young man tacitly followed.

"Have a chair by the fire. Give me your hat. Mrs. Sanscript is dishing up the dinner now. I smell it—don't you?"

The young man sniffed the air, and his face lighted up with a hungry and expectant expression.

"That most prominent odour—the one nearest you—is the stuffin' for the duck. You like stuffed ducks, don't you?"

"I'm very fond of duck," ventured the young man.

"That's good. I thought you liked stuffed duck."

The young man smiled and nodded, which added confidence to the host's assurance.

"Had we better not transact a little business before dinner, Mr. Sanscript?"

"Oh, ah, certainly! to be sure. How stupid of me, now. I never thought about it that you always have prayers first."

"Excuse me," stammered the young man, as he flushed up with a wild dazed sort of look. "Excuse me, sir, but I never said prayers, except on Sundays and when I get up and go to bed, in my life!"

"What!—never said—— Eh, you're joking!"

"Upon my word, I'm not—much as I'm ashamed to own it."

Sanscript stroked his chin, and struggled hard to collect his scattered thoughts, and mentally observed:

"Well, here's a queer parson!"

"I thought, perhaps, you'd like to subscribe," mildly continued the young man.

"Subscribe! Oh, yes, to be sure! Why, certainly!" Then, to himself: "The mercenary villain! He attacks me for the heathen before we sit down to dine."

Then, aloud: "This is for the heathen, I suppose?"

"I don't exactly catch your meaning."

"For the missionary fund, I suppose?"

"What missionary fund?"

"How should I know? You ought to know?"

"Perhaps; but will you subscribe?"

"Why, certainly. How much is it?"

"Ten shillings."

Sanscript went down into his pocket, produced the money, and passed it over.

"Thank you," smiled the young man, ramming the cash into his pocket.

"When shall I deliver the book?"

"What book?"

It was Sanscript's turn now to be puzzled.

"Why, the 'Meandering Muleteers; or, the Mystery of the Murdered Man.'"

A light seemed breaking into Sanscript's mind. He grasped the poker, and hoarsely whispered:

"Young man, who are you? What are you?"

The visitor took the precaution to rise and slide near the door before he answered:

"The canvasser for this book under my arm, the——"

"And you are not a parson?"

"No, sir."

"Well, I'm——"

There was a rush, a scurry of feet, the opening of a door, a dull thud as if leather and flesh had come together, and two men went tumbling down the front steps to the pavement, and Sanscript *wasn't* one of them. The canvasser's exit was so violent and sudden that a man coming up the steps at that moment had not time to get out of the way. Both went rattling down together. The new visitor picked himself up and looked after the canvasser, who was limping away as fast as exhausted nature could carry him. Finally, visitor number two cautiously ascended the steps, ducking and dodging as if expecting some infernal machine to be sprung upon him at every step. He rang the bell.

Sanscript again came to the door. "Well, sir?"

The visitor fairly jumped from the ground in affright.

"Is this where Mr. Sancript lives?" he asked.

"What if it is? What do you want?"

"Softly, softly, brother Sanscript. The good book says——"

"Oh, you're a book canvasser too, are you? Well, I'll jolly soon settle you."

Away went visitor number two after the manner of visitor number one. As he slid off the top of Sanscript's right boot, the horrified voice of Mrs. Sanscript arose in an excited key from the doorway: "John, John, what have you done? Is that the way you treat my minister?"

Let us draw the veil.

CHARLES ANSON.

No. VI.—THE HOLE IN THE FLOOR.

MR. ROGER HALLY was the senior partner in the firm of Hally and Co., of East London.

They manufactured on a large scale a certain comestible largely consumed at the present day—the secret of the manufacture of which they alone possessed.

Many could, and did, manufacture crude imitations, but for excellence and quality none could approach the high standard of the article produced by Hally and Co.'s own special process.

None could successfully compete with them, none hope to wrest from their hands their position at the head of that particular industry.

Yet Roger Hally was not happy.

As he entered Edward Farrell's laboratory a look of intense anxiety was upon his face.

He had written asking for an interview with Edward Farrell, and was now there in fulfilment of the appointment made.

Edward Farrell looked up from the combustion furnace at which he was working as Roger Hally entered.

"Good morning!—Mr. Hally, I presume?" said he, rising, "If you will just excuse me for about five minutes until I have finished off this combustion, I shall be pleased to attend to you."

Roger Hally watched the deft manner in which Edward Farrell manipulated his apparatus, and could not help admiring the skill he showed.

He treated his apparatus as if it were a tender and well-loved child, a touch here, a stopper there, a piece of tube to be shifted somewhere else, all so gently and tenderly, and withal so skilfully, that the most casual observer could see that he loved his work.

Roger Hally had chemists of his own at his works, but he saw with regret that none worked like Farrell.

Perhaps that was the secret of Farrell's success.

The combustion finished, Farrell turned to his visitor.

"Now, Mr. Hally, I am at your service. What can I do for you?"

Roger Hally settled himself with an effort before replying, evidently his visit was the outcome of necessity rather than of choice.

"You may wonder," said he, "why, having a staff of chemists of my own, I find it necessary to trouble you.

"I will try and explain.

"You know the article for which our firm is so well famed—and are doubtless aware that we owe the excellence of our production to the special secret process we use in its manufacture.

"It is a somewhat complicated process, and necessitates a certain amount of chemical supervision.

"We have a trained staff of chemists whose duty it is to superintend the manufacture, and to test the finished product.

"In this way we have managed to keep up the quality of our output to a high standard of excellence, and thus have built up a reputation and a connection that is world-wide.

"Now, suddenly, ruin seems to stare us in the face.

"Try as we will, we seem to be absolutely unable to turn out the same uniform quality of article as before.

"At least every other batch is spoilt—spoilt mysteriously and completely.

"All my chemists have tried to locate the cause, but without success.

"I have offered them large rewards if they will only solve the mystery, but a mystery it still remains; and in the meantime my whole trade is being ruined, I cannot supply my customers, and thousands of pounds' worth of materials are being emptied down the drain.

"The worry of it all is beginning to tell upon me, and yet, anxious as I am, I can do nothing.

"I heard from a friend of mine about some of the mysteries you have been instrumental in solving, and I resolved, as a last resource, to consult you.

"I want you to come down to the works and investigate the whole matter if you will, Mr. Farrell," and Roger Hally looked expectantly towards Farrell, who was sitting opposite him, apparently lost in deep thought.

He roused himself as Hally finished speaking. "Certainly I will come," he said, "and with pleasure.

"Your story interests me greatly, and," continued he with a smile, "as my profession teaches me that every effect, however strange and mysterious, has a cause, I do not doubt but that we shall be able eventually to run to earth the particular cause that is producing such disastrous effects with you.

"Now I should be pleased to hear a few more of the details—Do you get every batch spoilt?"

"No!" replied Hally, with a more hopeful look on his face, as he heard Farrell's confident tone, "that is the strange part about it—all are treated in exactly the same way, yet some batches come out as right as possible, and others are completely spoilt. It is the strange uncertainty of it all that is so unsatisfactory and annoying.

"Why should they come out right sometimes and wrong at others? That's what I fail to understand.

"My chemists tell me that it must be some obscure chemical process that sometimes finds the conditions favourable, and so spreads through the whole batch—

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but at other times, owing to some unfavourable condition, is unable to spread and spoil. All very fine, I tell them, like most of their fine theories—but it is most probably just a cover for their ignorance.

"I don't want their fine theories"—and Roger Hally, in his excitement banged the bench with his clenched fist—"I don't want them, I tell you—I want them to *do* something—I want them to turn out every batch *right*."

Farrell smiled quietly at his vehemence.

"Have you been able to find out at what stage in the process the change takes place?" asked he.

"Yes; every time it takes place at the same point.

"We operate on quantities of about two tons, and at a certain stage it has to be left to stand for about twelve hours in a large vat that is kept at an even temperature all the time by means of a steam coil. The room in which these vats are situated is always locked as soon as the chemist in charge has left it, and is not again opened until twelve hours has elapsed, that is, unless something special has to be done.

"It is at this stage that the mysterious change takes place, and do what we will we cannot account for it.

"We have had our chemists watching it all night, and nobody and nothing goes near the vat, and yet the change takes place, and everything is spoilt.

"It is ruining us, I tell you, and unless something is done soon we shall have to stop our works.

"I would give any money to get to the bottom of the whole business," and the lines of worry deepened on his face as he spoke. Edward Farrell had listened to Hally's further account very quietly, and the thoughtful look on his face had settled down to one of deep concentration.

He roused himself again as Hally stopped. "Let us get down to the works again as soon as we can," he said, "this bids fair to be interesting, and if there is an explanation to this mystery, I won't leave you till it is forthcoming."

Roger Hally thanked Farrell for his interest, and felt more hopeful as he saw the confident look of power in Farrell's thoughtful eyes.

"I find it best," said Farrell, "when I am searching for anything, not to let everyone know it, so perhaps it would be as well if you took me to see the works quite as a friend—without any reference to the real object of my visit.

"It may be an unnecessary precaution, but it is better to be sure than sorry.

"Now, if you will excuse me for about two minutes I shall then be quite at your service."

* * * *

The works of Messrs. Hally and Co. were situated in the extreme east of London, near one of the large London docks. There was an air of solid money-making prosperity about the black, smoke-begrimed exterior of the buildings.

Three large square blocks, standing on the bank of the Thames, in the midst of a spacious yard, reared themselves as a monument to the industry of Roger Hally.

Busy cranes, puffing engines, heavily-laden waggons, all told of the vast business that had been built up, yet all this was in danger of being lost, all was tottering on the verge of ruin.

Farrell, as he arrived at the gates in Hally's hansom, could keenly appreciate the anxiety and wearing apprehension that such a possibility of ruin must occasion.

Roger Hally conducted Farrell to his private room, introducing him to his manager and assistant-manager on the way.

The manager, Farrell instinctively liked. He had the fine open face of a true gentleman, but the assistant-manager he just as instinctively disliked.

The little mean face, and the shifty eyes were not ones likely to inspire confidence, yet there was a look of cleverness about the man that would have commanded respect for him as an enemy.

He had all the makings of a clever rogue in his face.

Roger Hally explained to Farrell that the manager had been recently appointed, much to the disgust of

"I want you to come down to the works and investigate the whole matter if you will, Mr. Farrell."

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the assistant, who had hoped to be promoted when the old manager left.

"We had the works to consider, however," said Hally, "and we felt that Clare—the assistant—was not competent to undertake the higher duties. He is a clever chemist, but he lacks power over the men, and he is not a good organiser. But what do you say, shall we take a walk over the works now, then you can think things over a bit?"

Farrell agreed that it would be well, and together Hally and he set out to inspect the works.

Everything was in splendid condition—Hally believed in keeping his works up to a high state of efficiency—and did not let them run to ruin from any false sense of economy.

Past long lines of boilers, through mazes of machinery, past beautifully kept copper vacuum pans they went Up into large rooms, stifling with moist heat, and past swiftly-spinning centrifugal machines.

Farrell could not but admire the skilful designing of it all, and could tell the long years of patient toil that had served to build up such a smoothly working plant.

Hally led the way into one room somewhat smaller than the others.

Two large cast-iron pans or vats occupied most of the space.

"This," said he, "is the room where all the trouble and mystery appears to originate."

"We only use one vat at a time, and at present we are using that," pointing to the nearer of the two. "It contains a batch that was spoilt last night, and it will all have to be thrown away."

Farrell went to the edge of the vat and looked in.

"May I take a sample?" he asked.

"Certainly! And if you would like to test it, the chemists will all be at lunch just now so that you can have their laboratory to yourself."

"That's splendid!" Farrell replied.

He took the sample to the laboratory and tested it and compared it with the unspoilt samples that Hally had supplied him with.

He was deep in thought for a long time. An amused look had spread over his face towards the end of his examination.

"I don't wonder your chemists were a bit puzzled," said he, "yet it is very simple after all."

"You don't mean to say you have found out all about it?" cried Hally excitedly.

"Not quite that," said Farrell, "but enough to be able to tell you that it won't occur again after to-night. There's some trickery at the bottom of it, I can tell you that much."

"*Trickery!*" almost shouted Hally. "Trickery! — here! Who would be so mean?"

"That I can't tell you," said Farrell, "but we'll find out to-night. Come with me."

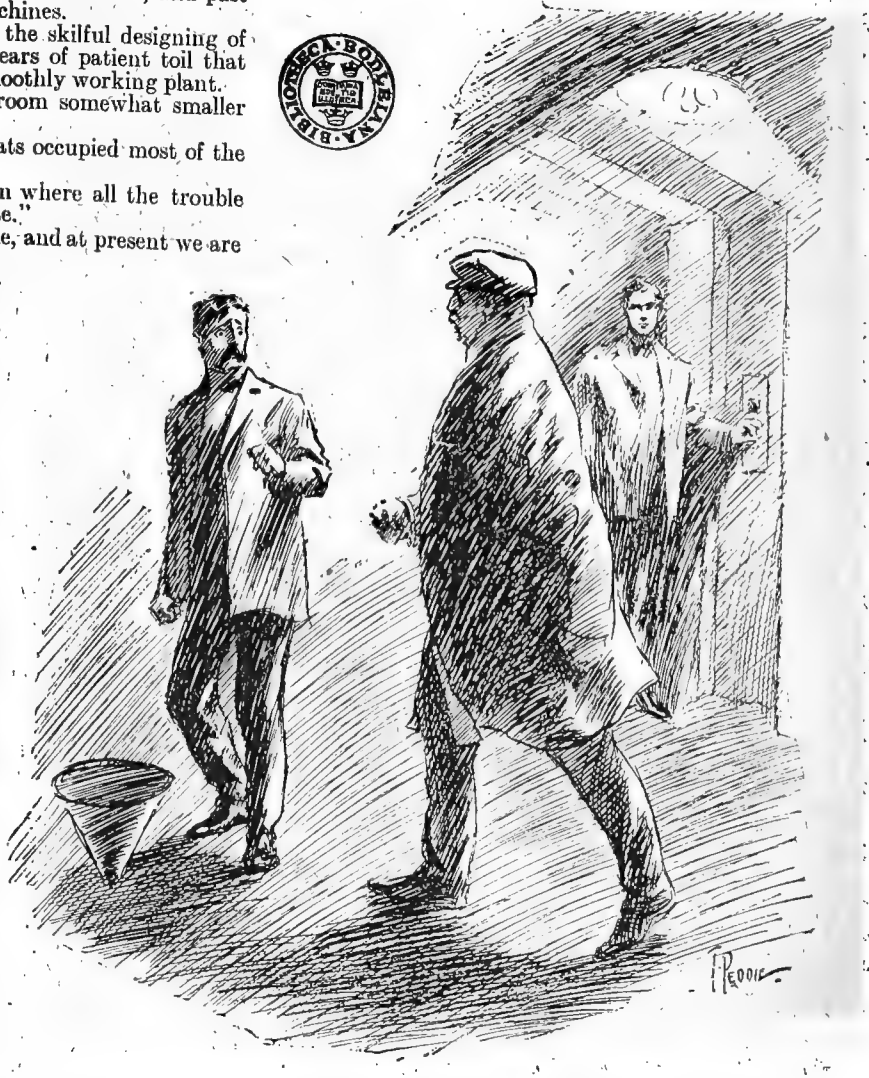
Farrell took Hally to the vat room again, and began to examine closely all round, over, and under the vats.

At first he seemed unable to see what he wanted. Hally wondered what he could be looking for. After a few minutes search, however, Farrell espied a hole about an inch in diameter in the iron floor above, but so concealed behind the steam-pipe that led into the vat that from the front of the vat it was invisible.

He seized Hally's arm and pointed to the hole.

"That's the secret," said he, almost in a whisper. "Now take me to the floor above, quick."

Hally was bewildered. Was Farrell mad? What had a hole in the floor above to do with the spoiling of his trade?



"You are the sneak, the traitor that has betrayed your master and your fellow men," said Hally, and he made as though he would strike him.

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He couldn't understand it at all, but he led Farrell to the floor above.

Farrell noted the position of the hole from above, and started to look round the place in search of something.

In all the corners, all the most secret and hidden places he looked, and at last his search was rewarded. He gave a shout of joy, beckoned Hally to him, and pointed behind some casks in the corner of the room.

Hally looked, expecting to see goodness knows what, but all that met his eye was an iron tube about seven feet long, ending in a funnel.

"Don't you see through it all now?" asked Farrell. Hally shook his head.

"You will to-night, then, I think. Can you have a fresh batch run into the vat below for to-night? If so we will come up here and watch."

Hally promised with a wondering face to arrange it.

"Now come on down and don't speak of this; we may be watched for all we know."

* * * * *

As darkness fell upon the works, Farrell and Hally crept unobserved to the floor above the vats.

Farrell chose a position in one corner where they could both see all that happened on the floor, without being themselves observed. They made themselves as comfortable as possible, for they could not tell but that they might have to wait for hours.

It seemed likely that they would, too, for at least two hours passed before anything unusual happened.

Hally, knowing not for what he was waiting, began to feel impatient, but dared utter no word.

The whole room was filled with a dim light from the open crane door, with the exception of the corner in which the two men were crouching.

The doorway looked out upon the half-dark night world spread out below; it was guarded by an iron bar, and the chain of the crane ran like a thin, shadowy spider's web to the ground.

All at once the chain began to rise slowly—very slowly.

Somebody was using the crane.

What could it mean at that time of night?

Up—up it came, almost at a snail's pace, then slowly they saw the form of a man swing into sight.

As he came opposite their doorway, with a dexterous spring he landed on the little platform outside the iron bar, lifted the bar, then lowered the crane to the ground again, and crept cautiously into the room.

It was too dark to distinguish who it was, but they could dimly see his movements as he crept about.

First he went to the hole in the floor and peeped down.

Then he crept to the iron tube with the funnel end.

This he slowly and quietly, so quietly, inserted into the hole, and lowered it into the vat beneath.

Next from under his coat he took what looked to be a fairly large earthenware bottle, and was just proceeding to pour its contents down the funnel, when he dropped the whole lot with a crash, and sprang to his feet with a look of horror.

The whole chamber had suddenly filled with a blaze of light.

Farrell had switched on the electric light. The frightened wretch saw before him, in proportions magnified by the sudden and unexpected light, the accusing forms of Hally and Farrell.

They, too, saw with amazement that their mysterious visitor—the clever sneak who had tried to ruin his employer's business—was none other than the assistant manager, Clare.

Before anyone could speak he rushed towards the crane as though to escape, but Farrell, with a quick bound barred the way. With a terrified look Clare turned away, only to confront his master, who was now beginning to recover himself somewhat.

"So," began Hally, as the terrified wretch cringed before him, "this is the secret of our trouble, is it? You are the sneak, the traitor, that has betrayed your master and your fellow men," and in his excitement he made as though he would strike him. With an effort he mastered himself, however.

"No," said he bitterly, "I won't waste my strength on you. Go, while I can keep my hands still. For your wife and children's sakes, I will spare you, but I never wish to set eyes on you again." Then, as the guilty wretch still cringed before him, "Go!" he shouted, with a stamp of his foot. "Go! before I repent my leniency."

Without uttering a word, but with lips that moved in gibberings of rage and fear, the man crept like a beaten cur from the presence of his master.

Out from the blaze of light he passed, into the darkness of the night, and was seen no more.

* * * * *

"Oh, no—it's not so wonderful as you think," said Farrell, as Roger Hally and he were talking it over later, "it's only a case of reasoning it out. How did I come to my conclusions so quickly? Well, don't you see? There were the two samples, one spoilt, the other all right. I found a certain change had taken place, and I knew there was only one thing that would cause it. You didn't put that thing in, then somebody else did, and secretly—see? When I examined the place and found the hole and the funnel tube, I could see the whole plot. Simple, isn't it?

"Eh? His motive? Well, I should judge from what you told me, jealousy—upset at not being appointed manager. A cigar? Thanks! You have found out my weakness, I see."

Philip Moon.

ENGAGED GIRLS!

It is always interesting to know other people's opinion of yourself, especially when that opinion is absolutely unbiassed. If you want to know what sort of a person you are, send a specimen of your handwriting to

RANEE, 32 Pearson's Buildings, Henrietta Street, London, W.C., inclosing six penny stamps and a stamped addressed envelope.

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: : : For March : : Price 6d. : : :

THE CHILD DEBUTANTE.

The Story of a Short-Lived Triumph.

SURELY no child ever gave greater promise than Lizzie Verner of developing into a bright and clever woman. Though little more than six years old, she was "as bright as a button and as sharp as a needle," to use her grandmother's words; she was quick and wonderfully observant, a faculty which her father's mother delighted to cultivate.

Lizzie was a child of the stage; she breathed the air of the profession from the moment of her birth. Her father and mother were members of the Royalty company and had been so for years; in former days they had played the hero and heroine of the melodrama so often that stage love had become real affection, and they had entered the bonds of matrimony. Emily Verner had not given up her profession; the audiences would have missed her terribly, for she had won their favour to as great a degree as her husband had done; so they continued to play the leading parts in the old plays and the new productions, and added to the laurels that had already fallen to their share in the old town.

Jack Verner's mother lived with them and took care of Lizzie, for her father and mother had but little time to spare for her. They were far too tired to rise early in the morning, and too busy during the day with the rehearsal of old parts and the learning of new ones to give her much attention. In those days, and in that town, a play did not have a long run; the patrons of the Royalty liked change. Old favourites were revived from time to time and were welcomed, but quick change was the watchword, and rehearsals were frequent.

Many a time had Lizzie been lulled to sleep by the soothing murmur of love passages heard through the thin partition of the two rooms; and quite as often had she been aroused from a refreshing afternoon sleep by a vehement denunciation by one or the other of the villain of the piece.

So absorbed were the parents in their work that they did not see the child's good qualities as clearly as grandmother, who croned over her, fondled her, and bestowed upon her all the love of which her old heart was capable.

But when she was six Jack and Emily began to notice the child's intelligence. She could repeat rhymes of considerable length with surprising accuracy; she knew the names of quite a number of garden flowers, and was possessed of knowledge beyond her years.

"If she had playmates of her own age," said the grandmother, "she would be different."

"But I don't want her to be different," remarked Jack, one day when his mother had thus commented on the reason of the child's precocity. "We want her as she is, don't we, Em? That girl will make a first-class leading lady one of these days. I wish we could bring her in for a child's part, somehow."

"Nonsense!" exclaimed granny testily. "Let the child be a child; she will be a woman, with all a woman's work, fast enough."

"But, if what you have told us is the correct explanation, you have been making a woman of her for a long time, mother," laughed Jack. And Emily smiled, as though agreeing partly with each of them.

"Yes," said Jack, in a determined tone about a week later, "we must work Lizzie in for some child's part at the Royalty. I'll have a chat with Bonner. He'll have to be getting up a new piece soon, and I'll see if he can get in some lines for Lizzie. I have no doubt we can arrange it with the manager, and I'm sure it would fetch the audience. Why, the gallery and pit would be frantic, and we should get the boxes and stalls, too, if it were well done!"

Grandmother held her peace, but in her heart she hoped that the scheme would fall through. Jack had told her laughingly that her objection was nothing but jealousy at somebody else taking the child in hand; but she knew better.

"Do it?" repeated Bonner, when he was informed by Jack of his desire that Lizzie should have a part. "Why, you come like an angel to solve a problem that has been worrying me for a week! I've got a splendid idea for a short piece, but I've been dubious about it because I want a clever youngster. Going on for seven, eh? How time flies! Should have said she was three, if I'd been asked. Just the very thing! You must let me see her, so that I can fit it in, you know."

Bonner saw the child and was delighted. His difficulty was removed, and he could go on with the writing of the play.

The scene of the drama was in Spain at the time of the Peninsula War. Jack was to be an old soldier—a corporal—and the idea was that the general in command of that wing of our troops was to place his little girl in the charge of the corporal during an attack on a position occupied by the enemy. The corporal bewails his hard luck at having to act as nurse instead of joining his comrades in the fight.

The soldiers depart, and the corporal hoists the little one on his knapsack and, after a while, steals off in the same direction to catch a glimpse of the battle.

He is standing near some trees, unseen, as he thinks, when some of the enemy, who have endeavoured to make a flank movement, open fire upon him in the belief that the glitter of the bayonet betokens the presence of a company. The bullets whizz about him and the child, scattering the leaves and tearing off the bark. The old soldier ought to withdraw to a place of safety on account of the general's daughter, but his fighting instincts get the better of him, and, with the girl still on his knapsack, he puts his musket to his shoulder and fires back.

The child screams with delight at the rattle of musketry and claps her hands; this continues till a company of British troops comes to the rescue of the fighting corporal. Just then the general is brought back mortally wounded,

and, in an affecting scene, he commends his child to the care of the old soldier, and dies.

The plot of the piece was not exactly logical, but the patrons of the Royalty were not hard to please in the matter of plot; what they required was plenty of go and sentiment, and *The Old Soldier* was the sort of thing to bring down the house. The manager was greatly pleased, and when he had heard Lizzie repeat a few of her "lines," he engaged her for the run of the play.

Rehearsals began, and Lizzie came fully up to expectations as Marian, the general's daughter; she knew her lines thoroughly, and scarcely ever required her father's promptings to catch her cues. There was a chance that she might be frightened by the firing, but her father did his best to prepare her for this, and, of course, she would be with him. But in the rehearsals, in which the firing was purposely introduced as a test, she behaved admirably, appearing really to enjoy it, and all fears were allayed.

Jack and Emily Verner were in high spirits and intensely proud of Lizzie. They dreamt of a brilliant future for her, and made plans as to what she should do for years to come.

"It isn't for the money she will earn," said Jack Verner to the author of the piece. "Money is always acceptable, I know, but we are not greedy. No; I'm pleased and proud because I can see a grand future for her. I can see her beginning where her mother and I leave off, so to speak, and not have to fight her way up step by step, as we have done, and then only get a little way up."

Old Mrs. Verner was the only one who was not elated; she shook her head sorrowfully when the child was taken from her for rehearsals, and she occasionally damped her son's enthusiasm by a warning observation.

"Don't you worry yourself about Lizzie, mother," he interrupted, one day, with just a show of anger. "She will be all right. I know what I am about."

And after that the loving granny could say no more.

The Old Soldier was produced, and was a tremendous success. The local papers praised the child's performance and declared that she made the drama. Both Jack and Emily were beside themselves with joy.

"I told you she would be all right!" cried Jack triumphantly to his mother. "But you would worry about her, you foolish old grandmother! Talk about mothers spoiling the children, why, it's the grannies who do that."

The old woman smiled, but it was a smile without mirth. She went to the bedroom where the little girl was sleeping, bent over her and kissed her.

"I hope you will be all right, my darling," she whispered. And a tear trickled down her cheek.

The piece had an unprecedented run; the child was the talk of the town. Everybody praised Lizzie, but only granny observed the effects of the strain. The child was becoming pale, irritable, and altogether different.

"Jack, isn't the piece to be withdrawn soon?" she asked, at last.

"Still worrying about Lizzie? Well, I don't suppose it will go much longer."

"If it doesn't stop soon, Jack, she will have to give it up. I say that she ought not to play another night; if she does you must take the consequences."

"Nothing of the sort," retorted Jack roughly. "She will go through the run now; it won't be long."

Emily was rather disturbed at the grandmother's words; she now noticed that Lizzie was pale, but she only ventured a timid remark to her husband, who quickly silenced her.

Verner appealed to the ladies of the company that evening; they were all in love with the little pet and sided with Jack. Of course she was a little pale, but that wasn't anything to worry over. She was such a dear!

The run of the play came to an end a fortnight later. The new piece was due on Saturday, but the manager had to put on a substitute for *The Old Soldier* for Thursday and Friday, as Lizzie Verner was not well enough to play. The child had no sleep on the Wednesday night, and the next day she was delirious.

A severe attack of brain fever, the doctor gravely announced; she must have the greatest care. There was no lack of care; with a look of upbraiding that cut Jack Verner to the heart, his mother took despotic charge of her darling, and devoted herself entirely and untiringly to the sufferer.

In the midst of what appeared to be a period of rest, when all were sitting still or moving slowly and softly from one place to another for fear of disturbing her, the child would rise in the bed, her eyes starting and her hands outstretched, and repeat some of the words, either of her own part or others. "The enemy! They are upon me! No, I will not turn my back to the foe, though they are a hundred to one!" "Ah! that was near, but I will pay it back!" "Hurrah, here come the boys! Drive them off!"

She would clap her hands and laugh—such a feeble clap, and so hysterical a laugh! Then, exhausted, she would fall back on the pillow.

More and more feeble became the ravings until they were reduced to a whisper, and the child could not raise her hands in the familiar gesture. With hollow eyes the grandmother watched the life-stream ebb away, and when the end came she flung herself on the bed with a bitter cry and would not be comforted.

Not a word of reproach to her son came from the old woman's lips in the days that intervened between death and burial, but Jack avoided looking straight at her, for he knew what he would see. He had sacrificed his offspring to his pride; he felt like a murderer.

They laid Lizzie to rest in the pretty churchyard; there was a large crowd and many splendid wreaths. Then they went back to the desolate home.

At night they noticed that grandmother was missing. Jack waited till a late hour for her to return, but she came not. He went out and made inquiries, but no trace of her could be found. Neither he nor Emily slept that night, and at daybreak he was out again.

They found her at last. She was lying beside the half-filled grave of her little pet, a sweet smile on her care-worn face—dead.

Grace Castles.

IN CONFIDENCE.

Conducted by MADGE MORRIS.

[*I shall be glad to answer, to the best of my ability, any letters from readers dealing with affairs of the heart, tangles in domestic life, or points of etiquette. All communications must be addressed to me personally, c/o the Editor of* SHORT STORIES.]

Is it Love?

WHEN "SNOWDROP" and her young man, who have been going out for four years, quarrel so much that sometimes they do not speak for a month, though at times they are very fond of each other? Love, "SNOWDROP," is very like vaccination. On some people it scarcely "takes" at all, while with others they are so bad as to be quite ill. At the same time, both are inoculated. Now, love, to some people, is the usher of peace and happiness, undisturbed by a cloud, while with others, it brings in storm and fury.

❦❦❦

All is a matter of temperament. You and your young man belong to the latter category, but I do not suppose you are any the less in love with each other, so don't bother about the ethics of the matter. Just see to it that, though you may be continually having tiffs, there is no real reason for them; and your lives, though perhaps a trifle boisterous, will be none the less happy.

❦❦❦

"EDGAR" has similar doubts, though the circumstances are quite different. London has come between him and a young lady who was his sweetheart. They had been together continually until cruel Fate hurled him from the north to the south of the Metropolis, which prevented their ever seeing each other, or corresponding. The other day they met again, and, the lady being disengaged, "EDGAR" wants to know how he can place matters on the old footing. How should he go about it?

❦❦❦

I fear, "EDGAR," you cannot have been very much in love to allow such a trivial thing as London to separate you. Surely you could have met her, or written to her had you really wished to continue your courtship? Your love cannot be of a very durable quality if it is so dependent on locality. But if you really like each other, surely you will be able to resume relations of friendship without much difficulty. Why not ask her to go for a walk, or to a theatre? That will bring back reminiscences of the old days which may once more bring you together.

❦❦❦

The Other Young Man

HAS been bothering both "N. W." and "G. H." In the former case, the intervening suitor is in Australia, and "N. W." has an idea that the lady is quite as fond of him—if not fonder—as of her absent swain. Would he be justified in proposing? I think he would, just to see how the wind was blowing. You say she seems very fond of your company. Ask her how fond she is of it, and incidentally mention something about Australia. That would be a neat, diplomatic way of putting the matter before her in a nutshell.

❦❦❦

With "G. H." the "other young man" is a friend since boyhood. The awkward part of it is that both are attached to a girl who does not give either the slightest clue as to whom she likes the best. She is so unpleasantly pleasant to both that neither knows who's who in her estimation. Meanwhile, their friendship is a dead letter. Well, "G. H.," try strategy—say, the following:

❦❦❦

Just tell the other man that he has no business to trifle as he is doing. Urge him to be a man and state his case. Tell him that "faint heart never won fair lady" and other things, and finally get him to go and propose to her. Meanwhile, be very attentive and nice to her yourself, letting her know incidentally that you wish you were your friend, and lucky enough to possess her affection; that if you thought for one moment that you did, you would not hesitate to propose. Then, after he has proposed, hasten to congratulate her in a doleful manner on his supposed success. If she has accepted him, then you must give the thing up. Obviously she prefers him. But if not, then propose yourself, and settle matters once for all.

❦❦❦

Is She Heartless?

IF the handsome man whom she is about to marry is seized with a disease, and disfigured for life, and she throws him up? So writes "L. S." At bottom very, very heartless. To like a man purely for his good looks is a very debased sort of attachment. All girls who have such ideas of marriage would do well, during the present epidemic, to ask themselves if they would continue to love such a man were he disfigured for life? If not, then let them cease to think of him at all, for the test is a very real one indeed.

❦❦❦

The Motherless Girl,

WHOSE name is "CONNIE," has an aunt with whom she has been living since her mother died. "CONNIE" has a little money, which the aunt wants to be kept in the family, and wishes "CONNIE" to marry her cousin, the aunt's son, whom she does not like. Recently "CONNIE" had a proposal from a man she really cares for, and is in difficulty as to what she should do. She feels she owes her aunt a good deal, but the sacrifice of her lover seems too much to expect.

❦❦❦

It seems to me that your mother's sister has not carried out your mother's wishes; you have had a great deal to put up with since you lost your dear mother. I am always loth to counsel such a step, but you are of age now, and can marry if you wish. You are not bound to marry your cousin just because your aunt wants to get hold of the money which has come to you. Marry the man of your choice; but be quite sure that his affection is sincere.

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SAVED FROM THE LAW.

The Story of a Brother's Mercy.

CHAPTER I.

Brothers Two.

"I TELL you that I am an outcast through you!"

"Through me? You wrong me, Godwin—on my soul you do! Why! I would rather die than do you such an injury!"

"Psha! I am not a fool, Leonard! nor am I blind! You have my father's ear—the benefit of his influence—of his purse; while I—the elder—the real heir to both his money and his love, am sent adrift, so that you may reap that which of right belongs to me!"

"Well, Godwin, I will not argue it with you! You do me an injustice, which some day you will acknowledge."

"Never! never! The day that sees you and me face to face again, will see us as enemies—sworn foes!"

"At least let me explain why——"

"Explain nothing! Sufficient that you have lied to my father, and have made him cast me out, as one who has committed a great crime. For this, I will for once imitate you in that I will have no pity—no mercy!"

Leonard Axtell shrugged his shoulders in that exasperatingly deprecating way so irritating to one like his brother Godwin, whose naturally hot temper could ill brook the implied contempt and supercilious disbelief of the other.

The two, sons of an immensely wealthy coal owner on the Welsh border, were parting under somewhat peculiar circumstances.

Leonard Axtell was his father's darling. He was the younger son, but, as so often happens, the latest-born elbowed the first-born out into the open.

Old Charles Axtell's fortune was his to will to whom he would. No entail secured the interests of the eldest son. Leonard, of course, knew this, and being of a persuasive tongue, and of a pitilessly persistent nature, he played upon his father's partiality for himself for the securing of his own ends.

He was his father's right hand in everything; nothing went on, in pit, in office, or on the estate of Glaswyd, without his knowledge or consent.

Godwin, an open-hearted, open-handed young giant, just home from Cambridge, full of boating honours, bore with this for a time, but when by accident he learnt that his presence at Glaswyd was not desired, he made up his mind to throw up his prospects at the Bar, and to leave for London as a candidate for the journalistic and literary life.

But it was not altogether this which decided him, it was a certain communication made to him by one of his father's coal-hewers.

Owen Williams was not an ordinary miner; he had brains, and more, he kept them bright and unrusted. He was old and bent, but still vigorous and energetic.

"Do you know, Mr. Godwin," he said one day, "I'm a-going to break Mr. Leonard's head!"

"Break my brother's head, Owen! Why, what's he been doing?"

"Doing! What hasn't he done? He's lowered our wages! he's knocked off our free coal, and—and he's witched my little girl—my Nance!"

"Witched your daughter! You're talking riddles, man! It can't be!"

"It may seem a riddle to you, sir! but it ain't none to me. Mr. Leonard's a-making love to my Nance; and if he don't sheer off, and let her alone, I'll break his head—though he be my master's son!"

"This is true, Owen? I mean, you are sure of it?"

"Sure as I'm for night shift at six to-night! I thought, perhaps, as you could put it to him, Mr. Godwin, as it isn't right, for one like him to come buzzing round the likes of my little Nance, even if—if he does marry her, as he says he will."

"Look here, Owen, I'll speak to my brother! Meanwhile, say nothing to anybody. I am going to London to-morrow for a good long spell; but I'll try and stop this matter—if I can."

This conversation took place shortly after the one between the brothers. Godwin left the old miner with a fixed determination to stop any ill-assorted union Leonard might be contemplating.

It was in the gun-room that Godwin found his brother.

"Leonard!" he said. "I'm leaving here to-night, and shall probably never darken the doors of Glaswyd again, but I can't go without giving you a special word of warning."

"Of warning! Against what or whom? Well, do not be long about it, for the latest news with regard to my father is that he is not so well, and I wish to return to his room as soon as possible."

"My errand is quickly done! Owen Williams tells me that you are making love to his daughter Nance. Now, mark me! leave Nance alone. You would marry her of course—I give you credit for that much; but you would blight her life if you did; and, besides, old Owen declares that he will do you some personal injury in any event. He has other views for his daughter; and—and, in fact does not desire you as a husband for her."

"Godwin! I wish in turn to warn *you*. My business is my own, and no other man's—not even my elder brother's. You will have quite enough to do to manage your own affairs. Don't meddle with mine!"

"But I tell you——"

"You are too late, my dear fellow! By at least a week, for, just that time ago, Nance and I were married; and I shall do my best, both to falsify your very kind prophecy, and to take such precautions as shall effectually prevent my respected father-in-law from proceeding to undesirable extremities."

"Then I will go at once to my father and appeal to him on behalf of Owen and his daughter! The old man wants nothing—good, bad, or indifferent, to do with you, and——"

Godwin made to open the door. Before he could do so, however, a servant entered the room.

"Mr. Leonard! your father is dead!"

"Dead!" said both the young men in one breath

"Dr. Llewellyn, Mr. Leonard, had just come, but master was gone before he could get upstairs."

"Poor old dad!" said Godwin regretfully. "Well, Leonard, I shall remain in the neighbourhood till after my father is buried, and then when I am assured of my position, I will decide whether I go or stay."

CHAPTER II.

The Murder in Clanricarde Gardens, S.W.

"Tell Axtell, when he comes in, that I want him."

"He's here now, sir."

"Is he? Then send him up at once."

The editor of the *Daily Telephone* was evidently in a hurry about something.

"Ah, Axtell! anything special on?"

"No! Nothing except that company-promoting case in bankruptcy."

"Well you can turn that over to Whittaker. You've heard about this affair in Clanricarde Gardens, South Kensington, eh?"

"Yes! A lady namesake of my own—poisoned, they say!"

"I want you to get the case up; it promises to be something out of the common—sensationally considered."

"All right! Then I'll get away at once. I *want* to get ahead of the *Planet*; they always are saying that we can't touch them for smartness. This time, unless I'm very much mistaken, it will be the *Telephone* first, and the *Planet* nowhere."

"Well, do your best. All the people concerned in the thing are wealthy, and of good social position. Don't study expenses, but, if necessary, get on the trail of the husband, who, I hear, has absconded."

Godwin Axtell, Special Social Commissioner of the *Daily Telephone*, had, somehow, a curious feeling of near-at-hand strange happenings. Not that he consciously associated himself with this unhappy family in Clanricarde Gardens, for, so far as he knew, no family connection of his own lived within two hundred miles of London.

"I will at least satisfy myself as to whether these people are in any way related to me. I hope not, for I have enough trouble without the gruesome addition of this business."

Clanricarde Gardens is a semi-fashionable spot, lying midway between Chelsea and Kensington.

Civil servants of good position, retired Army and Navy officers, popular actors and singers, and the usual sprinkling of professional men, are the general type of tenants who occupy the somewhat pretentious mansions of the Gardens and the immediate neighbourhood.

No. 46 had, since midsummer, been the residence of a Mr. Martin Axtell and his wife.

The lady was good-looking, but evidently not well-bred, or over refined. She was not seen outside the house much except on fine days, in a closely-windowed brougham, being on all such occasions accompanied by her husband, a neatly turned-out fair man, of moderate height, and of about thirty years of age.

Then the wife ceased to go out, the husband going on long, lonely drives in a private hansom, and seldom returning until late at night, or the early hours of the next morning.

It was the cook who first discovered that anything was wrong. She had occasion to consult her mistress about some domestic matter, and knocked at the boudoir door about an hour after Mr. Axtell's departure.

It was not long before it was known, not only in the neighbourhood, but throughout London, that a cruel murder had been perpetrated.

Seated in her arm-chair, propped up by three or four pillows, and with her head slightly inclining to the right, sat Mrs. Axtell, in front of a huge mirror, that reflected her from head to foot.

The cook, who had entered the room after her knock, finding that Mrs. Axtell did not answer her, went closer and looked in her face.

Her mistress was quite dead!

The blueness of the lips, together with a suspicious blackness of the finger-nails, told unmistakably of death by poison.

When Godwin Axtell appeared in his journalistic capacity on the scene, he found police barriers at every point. There had, of late, been strong expressions current of both official and public opinion on the subject of newspaper detection and its methods; and the police in this instance seemed determined to place every obstacle in the way of reporters generally, and of the *Daily Telephone* representative in particular.

"See the body!" said the inspector to Godwin; "certainly not! No one gets within a mile of it if I can help it!"

"Oh, very well! Perhaps I may have my opportunity when it is taken to the mortuary."

"Which won't be till after the inquest, and not then if I have anything to say about it! A parcel of scribblers messing us about, and preventing us from doing our duty! It's scandalous—that's what it is!"

Now Godwin Axtell was not one of the easily discouraged sort, and he resolved at all hazards to turn the inspector's flank.

Policemen are but human, and when, Godwin apparently departed, the man of office retired to refresh exhausted nature, it was to leave the field in charge of the rustic wits of newly-recruited P.C. A. Z. 1001.

To the latter presently appeared the ubiquitous *Telephone* reporter.

How it was done, A. Z. 1001 to this day is unable to say. All that he does know is that half a sovereign changed hands; the rustic constable moved down the passage-way; and in two minutes or less, Godwin Axtell had returned from inside the boudoir, shutting the door quietly behind him.

There was a strange look on his face—a look only possible where the very deepest feelings of a man's nature were stirred.

It awed even A. Z. 1001, who took up his position again by the boudoir door, the corrupted incorruptible.

Passing out by the front entrance, Godwin encountered the inspector hastily returning from his furtive refresher.

"I thought you'd gone!" blurted out the latter.

"So I had," replied Godwin gravely, and yet with a certain expression of satisfied triumph about his eyes and lips. "But I changed my mind; and now I know quite sufficient to enable me to unlock the mystery—if mystery there be."

"What have you found? What do you know?"

"Something that you do not know. Something which will tell me a broader truth about this poor murdered soul, than you with all your official aids and methods will ever elicit! Good-day!"

In the woman lying upon the couch in the boudoir at No. 46, Clanricarde Gardens, Godwin Axtell recognised his brother's wife—Nance, the daughter of old Owen Williams, the coal-hewer of Glaswyn.

CHAPTER III.

The Last Link.

Those who are familiar with Southampton, know that at the back of High Street, below Bar, there are many quaint little squares and spots, the residents in which are, to all intents and purposes, out of the world.

One of these squares, consisting of about a couple of dozen old-fashioned houses, is especially hidden away and retired, affording, as it does, every opportunity for concealment from the public eye for those who, for some good reason, desire seclusion.

On the evening of the day that saw Nance Axtell done to death in London, an old decrepit man, quite well-dressed and carrying a fair sized Gladstone bag, strolled into the inclosure, and made for a house in the right-hand corner.

There was no bill in the window, but the stranger appeared to be known to the woman who opened the door. She addressed him as Mr. Martin, and claimed him as an old acquaintance.

"I have business, Mrs. Jeyes, that will detain me in the town for three, perhaps four days. Meanwhile I am so tired with a long journey that I shall rest indoors most of the time."

To the landlady this did not seem out of the way or odd, and telling him to be sure and call for whatever he required, she left him.

On the afternoon of the second day Mr. Martin went out for an hour; an act on his part which, could he but have foreseen the consequences of it, he would assuredly have refrained from.

The object of his walk was the office of a well-known line of Atlantic steamers.

He had a curious habit of lifting his left hand to smooth back his hair; and this he did two or three times when applying and paying for a saloon passage for New York.

There was another man in the outer office, who was apparently making some inquiries of one of the clerks, a recurrence of the little mannerism of Mr. Martin's, causing him to look fixedly at him.

His business done, the old gentleman quickly left the office, the other man following as quickly in his wake.

Soon the former was conscious that he was being shadowed, and did his best to double on his pursuer.

In his anxiety to do this, he lost his clue, and, diving under an archway through into a narrow *cul-de-sac*, found himself at bay, and face to face with the other.

The second man's action was extraordinary, and, had the place been any other than a bare, three-walled court, would, inevitably, have attracted people's attention.

He made a clutch at the hair of the figure in front of him, and with a smart jerk pulling at it, brought it, together with the venerable beard, away in his hand.

"Leonard Axtell!" he said, to the bare-headed, smooth-faced young man, who stood, self-confessed, before him, cowering and darting his eyes from one side to the other, to discover a chance of escape. "In defiance of all law, and of my duty to society, I am going to let you depart and use that ticket you have just bought; but before you leave this place, where no one sees us save the God you have outraged, I have a few words to say to you."

The miserable wretch stood straighter at the implied promise of ultimate release.

"Listen!" went on Godwin Axtell, his voice more the voice of a judge condemning a criminal, than that of a brother by blood. "I know, as all the world knows now, that the first for greed, the second in the lust of cruelty incarnate, you killed your father and your wife. Do not speak, or, perhaps, I may repent that which I now do. You have forged a chain about you that will drag with you to your grave-side, and the last link of which is to-day fitted in, in completion of your work.

I cannot give you up to justice! I cannot! for the same mother bore us; but if you would escape the due reward of your deeds, you will get you to some spot, the very loneliest in God's world, and there make what peace you can with your own soul, and with Him!"

* * * * *

The little corner house in the square has lost a lodger, and a man is flying for his life from the face of his Maker. and of his kind.

Ralph Enderby.

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A Written Proposal.

What the Posting of the Wrong Letter Did.

"I WANT you to do me a favour, Rogers," said Carson, after the usual greetings and inquiries concerning each other's health. "I'll tell you what I should like you to do," he continued rapidly, as though afraid that Rogers would decline if he were allowed to speak. I'm in love—perhaps I ought not to be at thirty-five—in love with a woman who would make me happy, and who, I fancy, likes me; but I can't make love. I'm too prosaic now, so I think of writing my proposal. See? If she says 'No!' she will not witness my discomfiture, because she must answer by letter, you know. But I can't write that letter for the life of me. You may call me a big fool, if you like, but it's a fact. I want you to sketch out a letter for me, old fellow. There! Do you understand?"

Rogers' eyes wandered to the portrait of a charming maiden that stood, half-hidden, on his mantelpiece. He stifled a sigh, and said:

"I'll write a draft letter for you, Carson, if you wish. I'll do it just as I would write it for myself. Light up one of those cigars"—motioning to a box on a side table, "and amuse yourself for a minute or two while I'm busy."

Another glance at the half-hidden portrait, and Rogers turned to his writing-table. Taking up his pen, he leant back in his chair and stared thoughtfully at the wall-paper in front; after quite two minutes' reflection he bent forward over the table, with a far-away look in his eyes, and began to write.

"What do you think of this, Carson?" he demanded, when he had finished, holding out the draft proposal, as he had called it.

Carson took it and surveyed it critically.

"You've done it in style, my boy! Good handwriting, your own address, all in order. Doesn't look like a mere draft, but let's see what you have said." He began to read. "My dear Gwynne." He raised his eyes. "Her name isn't Gwynne, you know! What made you think of that uncommon name? I never——"

"Oh, that's nothing! I happen to know a young lady of that name. Never mind that!" interrupted Rogers hastily, turning to hide his confusion.

Carson was too interested in his own affair to observe the effect of his remarks. He read the letter in silence.

"I'm afraid it won't do for me, Rogers," he protested regretfully, after the second reading. "It's all right, I daresay, and I rather like the last words, those about wearing the roses if she means to say 'Yes!' Only I'd prefer to have the reply by letter, in case it isn't favourable. But the letter is too sentimental for me."

"It seems to me," said Rogers drily, "that love and marriage are matters of sentiment. I told you I would make up a letter just as *I* should write it."

"Yes," returned Carson dubiously; "but I couldn't be as poetic as that. I couldn't act up to it. I wanted a plain, matter-of-fact statement, ending up in a plain question."

"Well, perhaps you can model your letter on that, taking out the sentiment," said Rogers stiffly and illogically. "I said that that was just as I should put it, and that's wrong, because I wouldn't write a proposal! I should go to the girl and say it! I believe that the women of to-day are not much different from those of the days of chivalry, when men were bold and won the love of their dames by gallant deeds done for those whom they loved and desired to possess! A proposal by letter! No! A proposal requires the proper setting, Carson; a moonlight ramble, a row on the lake, a rustic seat in a shady nook, according to whether it takes place by night or by day. You talk and edge closer together, till—till a straggling lock of hair brushes your cheek; you kiss, and—Ah!"

"I'll think it over," said Carson, laying the draft letter on the corner of Roger's writing-table unnoticed by its author. "I'll——"

A knock at the door cut short the sentence on Carson's lips, and without waiting for the customary "Come in!" a young man entered the room breezily.

"Hallo, Blake!" cried Rogers heartily. "Glad to see you! You know Carson, of course. That's right! take a seat and give us your opinion. Suppose you were in love with a girl, what would you do, Blake?"

"Marry her!" returned the new-comer promptly.

"Oh, of course, but wouldn't you ask her first?" queried Rogers, with an amused smile.

"Certainly! I should first make sure I was in love with her, and that she had some sort of a liking for me, and then I should get her consent and have the wedding as soon as possible."

"But how would you ask her? By letter?" questioned Rogers, casting a side look at Carson, who was shifting uneasily on his chair.

"Never!" ejaculated Blake, with an emphasis that indicated experience. "A woman's 'No!' in black and white, is about the hardest thing I know. If the girl thinks something of you—mind, I'm particular on that point—tell her your sentiments, don't write them. You may win a woman by the very ardour of your proposal, and how can a letter show as much

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warmth as you can put into a speech? You want the distant notes of sweet music——"

"Yes, we discussed all that," Rogers broke in, seeing that Carson was vexed. "You two go near the window and enjoy the summer breeze and your smokes for a minute or two, while I write a note of invitation to the theatre for to-morrow night. Nearly forgot it, by jove! Ought to have sent it two days ago, but it went clean out of my head! It may be too late now."

The two visitors did as Rogers requested. Rogers dashed off the note, sealed it in an envelope and addressed it to Miss Gwynne Kingsbury.

He walked to the window, took a seat between the others, and joined in the lively conversation until the darkness of a warm day had fallen over the city. When it was quite dark, Rogers arose to light the gas, and Carson and Blake expressed their intention of leaving him alone in the glory of his bachelor rooms.

"I must be off," said Carson, consulting his watch and emitting a short whistle. "Had no idea it was so late! How deceiving these lovely evenings are."

"I'm coming, too," observed Blake, knocking a little cigar ash off his sleeve. "I'm going your way, I think. Aren't you off to see Mason? Yes; then we can walk part of the way together. You won't walk with us for a constitutional, Rogers?"

"No, thanks! Sorry you must be off. Drop in again at these bachelor diggings as soon as you can, either of you. Oh, Blake! You might post this letter, and spare me the trouble of going out. I want it to reach—er—its destination first thing in the morning. My sister and I are going to the theatre to-morrow night, and I promised I would write to—the lady, and invite her to join us. We have taken tickets, and her father is away, you know, just now. Sis would be mad if she knew I had forgotten to send the invitation, so don't you forget to post it!"

"Never fear! That will be all right," said Blake airily. And they parted.

Rogers drew the half-hidden portrait towards the edge of the mantelpiece and gazed intently at it. No wonder he was in love with the original! A more bewitching girl, blossoming into womanhood, it would have been hard to find.

"What's the good of my cherishing hopes and living in a fool's paradise?" Rogers asked bitterly. "Look at the difference in our positions! I, a struggling, poverty-stricken artist. She, the daughter of a man of wealth and of aristocratic lineage! I am poor compared with him, and I am a nobody! Perhaps I ought to keep away from her set, which I should probably never have had a chance of entering if my sister hadn't married Markham."

He pushed the photograph back into its accustomed place with a sigh.

"No, I'll enjoy her society while I can get it. That will be sweet remembrance in the future!"

(*Continued on page* 380.)

Photographed for Death.

THERE are many celebrated women living to-day who have read their own obituary notices in the public press. The sensation must be exceedingly novel, if not unpleasant, and it may be presumed that few women would care to undergo the experience twice in their lives. Equally unpleasant must be the sensation of having your last photograph taken before death. Yet Mrs. Tong, of Gordon Avenue, Woodcock Street, Hull, was photographed for death, and below is her story as she related it to a *Hull Daily News* reporter. "I owe my life to Chas. Forde's Bile Beans! Ever since I can remember I have been in bad health. After marriage I became worse. Everything my friends advised me to take in the way of medicine I took, and I have been under the care of more than one doctor in Hull. With the birth of every child my condition grew worse. Often when I have been out I have been seized with dizzy fits, and have had to grasp the railings or anything near me to prevent me from falling. I was never free from biliousness, and I was so weak that I could hardly walk. I used to be sick at the very sight of food. I have been for days at a stretch and never broken my fast, and when I did it was only a little dry toast or a biscuit that I could eat. I became wasted away until I was almost like a shadow. Some time ago I was an out-patient at the Royal Infirmary, but despite the best medical treatment, I could not get any better.

"I was very nervous, and the least thing would upset me. Indeed, I could not bear my children to play near me. I was afraid at times to be left alone with them, because I had such pain in my head, and I feared I might do them some mischief. I really thought that I should have to be removed into the asylum. One doctor suggested that I should go into the hospital to be operated on, for I felt as though I was becoming blind. My sight was obscured continuously by a mist. Liver disease was the real cause of my troubles, and one doctor told me I had something growing on my liver.

"I was also told that unless I was operated on I should only live three years. I felt, however, that my time on earth was short, and I went and sat for a photograph with my husband, so that when I was gone my friends could have some remembrance of me."

"Well! You certainly don't now look like a woman who had been at death's door," said the reporter.

"No," replied Mrs. Tong: "Perhaps I do not, but for this I have only Bile Beans to thank."

"I sent for a box about four years ago, just when I felt like dying. The first few doses seemed to have a wonderful effect upon me, so I continued to take them. You may believe me or not, but they cured me of my defective sight and made me so well again that I went out and washed clothes in order to get money to buy more. As I took the medicine my pains ceased. I got better and better until I am once again enjoying good health. I have never since been without Bile Beans in the house. I am now altogether a different woman to what I was, and not only have I given Bile Beans to my own children when they needed medicine but I have given away dozens of Bile Beans to my neighbours."

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He walked about his room restlessly for nearly an hour, and then retired to bed at what, for him, was an early hour.

Rogers was partaking of luncheon in a restaurant about two o'clock on the following afternoon, when he saw Blake threading his way among the tables towards him.

"Found you at last!" exclaimed Blake. "I say, I'm awfully sorry!"

"What's wrong?" inquired Rogers, digging his fork rather viciously into a piece of meat. "Suppose you have heard that I didn't sell that canvas to old Jackson? Well, don't know how you got the news, seeing that I only heard this morning myself, but you'll understand that I'm quite as sorry about it as you!"

"Of course!" laughed Blake. "No, I'm not sorry about that, I mean," he added, correcting himself, "it's not *that* I am sorry about especially at this moment. I forgot all about that letter of yours. Yes, I understand that I am a pretty fellow to promise such a thing! But the worst of it is—I have lost it! Can't imagine where it can have gone! But I have put the matter right for you, and I've come to explain."

"How did you put it right?" asked Rogers, feeling somewhat relieved at hearing that the invitation would not be omitted altogether.

"Well, I remembered my neglect this morning, so I chased round to your rooms to tell you. You were out, and I didn't know what to do. In my dilemma, I tried the door of your sitting-room and it opened. So I took the liberty of entering."

"Yes." Rogers uttered the monosyllable impatiently.

"I went to your writing-table with the idea of scribbling a note of explanation and apology in case you came in while I was hunting for you, and I saw the copy of the invitation on the corner of the table. It was lucky that you took a copy, Rogers; I didn't give you credit for being so careful. So I put that in an envelope and addressed it to her, and sent it by special messenger."

"Copy? Copy of what?" gasped Rogers, in bewilderment.

"Copy of the invitation to the play, of course!" retorted Blake, with a show of irritation at the other's dulness. "I saw that the letter began, 'My dear Gwynne,' and had yesterday's date. I knew that the letter you gave me was for Miss Gwynne Kingsbury. So there you are. You're a bit dull this morning. Disappointment, I expect."

Rogers stood up, his face pale with anxiety, and kicked his chair aside.

"You really posted that letter to her?"

"Yes."

Roger's countenance became ghastly.

"Then you have ruined me, Blake. It was not a copy! Why, that stupid Carson must have left it there! Blake, that letter was never intended for *her*. It was for——"

Blake did not hear the last word, which was "Carson," and he could only gaze in amazement at Rogers as the latter seized his hat and rushed from the restaurant.

"Now, whoever would have thought that he was carrying on with two girls at the same time?" asked Blake of nobody. "And both named Gwynne, too! That's the extraordinary part of it! Poor beggar, I'm sorry I've got him into a mess, but he ought to have acted on the square!"

Rogers' brain was in a whirl as he strode homeward. That draft of a proposal of marriage, which he had written for Carson, had been left on his table by that individual, and had been posted to Gwynne by that idiot Blake! Rogers walked homewards without being aware of it, pondering on the result of the mishap. On his table he saw the note from Blake, who, after finding the supposed copy, had added these words: "It's all right; I have found the copy and sent it off, and, as an atonement, I will send a bouquet of the best roses I can find, along with the letter."

"That settles it," groaned Rogers. "That bouquet fits in with that line about wearing roses if the answer is favourable."

He sat for a good hour without moving; when he got up there was a set expression on his countenance that indicated resolution to perform an awkward task.

"I may as well go there and make an apology before she gets someone to come here and horsewhip me! That's the most gentlemanly thing to do. I shall be out of her good graces in the future, but it can't be helped. The next time Carson wants to marry a girl, he can marry her himself. I mean, he can write his own proposals. And as to Blake, I'd like to—to——"

He could not think of a punishment dreadful enough for "that idiot," so he left the sentence unfinished, and began to make his toilette for a visit to Miss Kingsbury.

He was particular about his dress. He had a delicate mission to perform, and he would have more chance of gaining pardon for his offence if he presented a good appearance. Perhaps he would not be permitted to enter? That was probable enough, but he would try.

During the short journey to Miss Kingsbury's home Rogers revolved in his mind the phrases he had penned in that memorable letter; the endearing terms, the expressions of hope that she would listen to his suit; his vows to make her happy if she would intrust her future to him—they all came back to him with a vividness that made him hesitate to carry out his resolution to face the consequences of the blunder.

"It's consummate impudence for me to aspire to her hand, and it was an unpardonable breach of good manners to have associated her with a sample offer of marriage! I don't suppose she will condescend to see me, but I may as well try."

His ring was answered, and he was shown into the reception room, while his card was taken to Miss Kingsbury. So far good; she would see him.

He waited anxiously for her appearance, and endeavoured to gain composure by turning his back to the door and looking through the window. He became so absorbed in his anxious thoughts that he did not hear the door softly open, and was only aroused by a rustle quite close to him. Wheeling round hurriedly, he found himself confronted by a vision of exceeding loveliness in the person of Gwynne Kingsbury.

Where was the haughty, angry expression which he had expected? In its stead he saw a light of welcome in her eyes, an enchanting flush on her cheeks, and a smile on her lips. In her waistband was a bunch of roses.

The truth burst on him all at once. The written proposal had been accepted, and the roses meant "Yes!"

Forgetting all restraint, he went towards her with outstretched arms, and a moment later she was folded in her lover's embrace.

The engagement received the approval of Mr. Kingsbury on his return; his daughter's happiness was his first consideration. Blake received a handsome meerschaum for his share in the affair, and now wishes that he could make as lucky a blunder on his own account.

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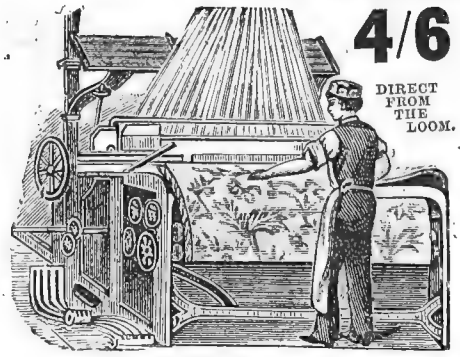

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To readers of SHORT STORIES, 22/3/1902. On receipt of Postal Order or stamps value 4/6 (Regd.), we will send you the **Largest Genuine Reversible Carpet in Brussels Finish, with Rug,** ever sold at the Price, direct from the Looms to any address on receipt of amount. Suitable for Drawing-room, Dining-room, Bedroom, &c., bordered and woven in Brussels Patterns, as an advertisement for our goods, thus saving any middle profit. Remember, these are woven, and are made of a material almost equal to wool. Thousands of these Carpets have been already sold at double these prices.

SPECIAL OFFER.—2 CARPETS AND 2 RUGS, 8s.

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Woven and Reversible, rich Brussels and Turkey Patterns and Colourings, superior quality, with handsome Border to match. A Marvel of Excellence and Beauty. These Carpets are superb imitations of real Brussels, and except by the closest scrutiny, the difference cannot be detected.

REDUCED SALE PRICES.

6 ft. by 6 ft.	2/11 each.	9 ft. by 10½ft.	8/6 each.	12 ft. by 13½ft.	14/6 each.
6 ft. by 7½ft.	3/11 ,,	9 ft. by 12 ft.	9/6 ,,	12 ft. by 15 ft.	15/9 ,,
6 ft. by 9 ft.	4/9 ,,	10½ft. by 12 ft.	11/6 ,,	12 ft. by 18 ft.	19/6 ,,
7½ft. by 9 ft.	5/11 ,,	9 ft. by 15 ft.	12/6 ,,	12 ft. by 21 ft.	22/6 ,,
9 ft. by 9 ft.	7/6 ,,	12 ft. by 12 ft.	12/9 ,,		

When ordering, please mention if for Bed, Dining, Drawing or Sitting Room, and any particular colour preferred.

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6 ft. by 9 ft.	7/6	9 ft. by 15 ft.	19/6
8 ft. by 9 ft.	9/-	12 ft. by 12 ft.	21/-
6 ft. by 12 ft.	10/6	12 ft. by 13½ft.	22/-
9 ft. by 9 ft.	11/-	12 ft. by 15 ft.	25/6
9 ft. by 10½ft.	13/6	12 ft. by 18 ft.	30/-
9 ft. by 12 ft.	15/-	12 ft. by 21 ft.	35/-

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Also **Rich Velvet Pile Stair Carpets**, bordered to match, 18in. wide, 1/8 per yard; 23½in. wide, 2/- per yard; 27in. wide 2/3 per yard.

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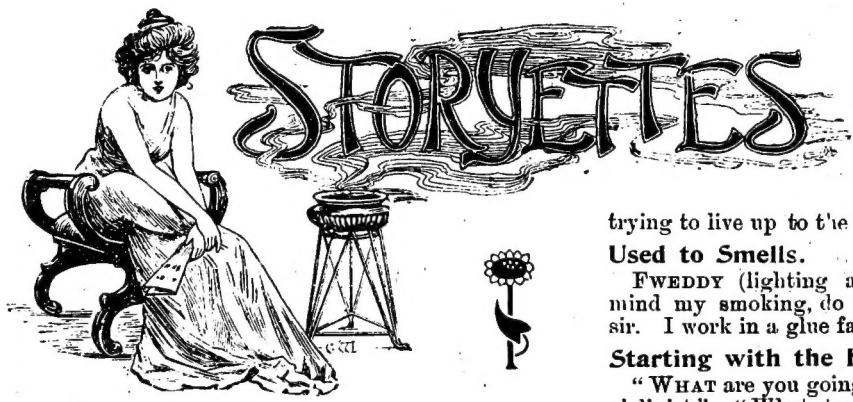

The Coveted Circle.

QUICKSON: "What exclusive and brilliant circle would you most like to enter?" May (demurely): "An engagement ring just now."

Splendid Place.

FIRST NURSE-GIRL: "So you've got a new place?" Second Nurse-girl: "Yes." "Do you like it?" "Like it? Why, it is right in front of a police-station!"

A Landlord in the Chair.

MAN IN BACK SEAT (rising): "Mr. Chairman, I wish to move——" Absent-minded Chairman: "I've got several houses I'd like—beg pardon, Mr. Williams. What is your motion?"

Bad Look-out for Him.

OPERATIC COMPOSER (whose first act, consisting entirely of plagiarised music, is being hissed): "Goodness! What will they do when they hear my own music in the next act?"

No Need for Repairs.

"OH, father, there is a hole in my shoe—give me the money to have it mended. The water runs in like a sieve." "My son, you should always save money when you can. Just cut another hole and the water will run out as fast as it comes in."

Good Reason for it.

MRS. CAWKER: "Don't you think it is very strange that Mrs. Stivetts hasn't returned or paid any attention to my call yet?" Mr. Cawker: "Not at all. It is merely the result of force of habit." Mrs. Cawker: "How is that?" Mr. Cawker: "She was a telephone girl before her marriage."

What Men Couldn't Do.

"YOU may talk all you like about women being the weaker sex," said Mrs. Snipps, "but the women of this country did something last year that men could never do?" "And that was?" inquired Mr. Snipps. "Lost fifty million hairpins, and wore the wings of three million birds on their hats."

He Hadn't Been Missed.

MR. LEACH: "I only called, Miss Gaysome, to apologise for disappointing you last evening—but, really, I couldn't find time to come——" Miss Gaysome: "Don't mention it, Mr. Leach. We never thought of it at all till after the company left, when pa noticed that the decanter on the sideboard had something left in it."

A Hard Task.

TUCKER: "Why do I look so troubled? Well, last night I dreamt I died, and was buried, Parker, and I saw the tombstone at the head of my grave." Parker: "Saw your tombstone, eh! And what of it?" "Why, I'm trying to live up to the epitaph I saw on it."

Used to Smells.

FWEDDY (lighting a cigarette): "You—aw—don't mind my smoking, do you?" Stranger: "Not at all, sir. I work in a glue factory."

Starting with the Hair.

"WHAT are you going to make of your son?" "A violinist." "What teacher have you got for him?" "Oh, we have not got so far as that yet. We're letting his hair grow first."

How Mother Would Find Out.

FIRST BOY: "You're 'fraid to fight, that's what." Second Boy: "No, I ain't; but if I fight you my mother'll lick me." "How will she find it out, eh?" "She'll see the doctor going to your house."

Another Mystery.

MAGISTRATE: "How do you account for the fact that the man's watch was found in your pocket?" Prisoner: "Your worship, life is made up of inexplicable mysteries, and I hope your worship will consider that when passing sentence."

What There Was Would Do.

GAMEKEEPER (to small boy whom he has caught bird-nesting): "Noo. I'm just gaun to gie ye a richt guid lickin'." Small Boy: "Please, sir, dinna lick me; folks say I'm no a' there." Gamekeeper: "Weel, I canna help that; I'll just lick what there is o' ye there."

Easy to Tell.

IT was in a geography lesson to Standard I. in an elementary school. After speaking about boundaries of countries, the teacher said: "Now, suppose I were in France" (pointing to that country), "and I went into Germany, how could I tell when I had left France and entered Germany?" One youngster, aged seven, immediately answered: "You would hear the German bands, please."

Why the Knives were Blunt.

GENTLEMAN: "Waiter, why are the knives in this establishment always so blunt?" Waiter (confidently): "Well, sir, you see, city gents are always in a dreffful hurry, and when their knives is blunt it takes 'em so long to cut their meat that they're often obliged to go away and leave half of it; and the 'leavings' make beautiful stews! It would never do to have sharp knives—it would ruin the business, sir!"

Was it Likely to be Right?

SOME time ago a man went to visit a friend who was an inmate of a lunatic asylum. After a prolonged chat in a humorous, if not very edifying vein, the visitor thought it about time to go. "Is that clock right, Jock?" he asked of the inmate. Jock gazed at him for a minute or so in speechless amazement, then, laying his hand compassionately on his shoulder, said: "Man, do ye think it would be here if it was right?"

The Brain Gymnasium.

In these competitions a prize of £1 1s. will be awarded each week to the competitor whose attempt we receive giving the correct solution of all the puzzles. If more than one is absolutely correct the prize of £1 1s. will be given to the first correct attempt dealt with.

If no lists of absolutely correct solutions are sent in, the first prize will be awarded to the competitor whose attempt is first dealt with showing the fewest mistakes.

Each week we shall award, in addition to the above, either ten of our gold-plated pencil-cases or ten popular novels, to be distributed amongst the competitors whose attempts are absolutely correct and have failed to win the first prize, or, if no complete lists of correct solutions are received, to those whose attempts show the fewest mistakes.

Write all your solutions on one side only of the paper, putting the number against each. Post the batch in an envelope marked "Brain Gymnasium, Nos. 73—78." to reach the Editor, *Short Stories*, 18 Henrietta Street, London, W.C., by first post on Tuesday, April 1st, 1902.

The Editor's decision is final, and competitors must only enter on that understanding.

Readers are invited to submit puzzles, acrostics, conundrums, word-squares, etc., for publication on this page. A gold-plated pencil-case will be given to each reader whose attempts are used. All attempts must be vouched for as original, and, of course, it is distinctly understood that the sender of a puzzle must neither compete in the competition nor divulge to anyone the solution. Any reader found infringing this rule will be severely dealt with.

No. 73. CONUNDRUM.

What word is that in the English language which, without any transposition, will ask the question—"Have I strength?"

No. 74. BEHEADED WORDS.

Behead to stab and leave a useful fluid.
Behead a fruit and leave to plough.
Behead a kind of fodder and leave one fond of anything.
Behead an inclosure and leave a drink.
Behead a stream and leave misfortune.
Behead firm and leave to board.
Behead to wear out and leave information.

No. 75. ENIGMA.

My first half is equal to half a gallon; my second half is never more than three-quarters done; my whole contains millions. What is it?

No. 76. WORD SQUARE.

Make a double word square the connecting word of which signifies outside:

AAA CC EEEEEEEE F H L M NN OO P RR SSS UU YY.

No. 77. DOUBLE ACROSTIC.

My first is an animal nimble and small,
My second a species of work musical,
My third is a substance to soothe and to heal,
My fourth is a sound Nature oft will reveal.
My fifth—they are flowers—p'raps the choicest there be,
My sixth is what schoolmasters do, you'll agree;
My seventh is a serpent of vast size I'm told,
My eighth is a jar, often centuries old;
My ninth is a boon to the shipwrecked at sea,
My tenth you possess—by your face I can see.
Eleventh, my last, forms part of a sight
Of beauty, but ah! you must seek it at night!

Initials and finals form the name of a famous poet and one of his best-known works.

No. 78. CHARADE.

My whole is what every man in the world is entitled to, what every man can possess if he likes, and no man can dispossess him of. Cut off my first letter and I become what will render any man powerless; yet he will still possess my whole.

Result of "Brain Gymnasium," Nos. 49 to 54.

The prize of £1 1s. has been awarded to Mr. F. W. Graham, of 386 Stanhope Road, South Shields.

A pencil-case has been forwarded to:

L. Anderson, care of Fownes Forge, Tyne Dock.
Eric Melville, 26 New Walls Road, Bristol.
E. Friend, 65 Eastern Road, Romford.
J. Johnston, 21 Little Victoria Street, Belfast.
C. Harrison, 386 Stanhope Road, Tyne Dock, South Shields.
P. Baillie, 3 West Grove Terrace, The Grove, Blackheath.
J. McLean, 24 Valleyfield Street, Edinburgh.
T. Pollett, 2 Hillfield Gardens, Muswell Hill, N.
J. Boyd, 77 Glencairn Street, Motherwell.
J. Keeler, 192 Rochdale Road, Oldham.

SOLUTIONS.

49. MADAM.

50. YARN.

51. MANY HANDS MAKE LIGHT WORK.

52.
K atydi D
I rawad I
P otoma C
L ur K
I mmur E
N anse N
G alashiel S

53.
CLOD
LOVE
OVER
DERWENT
EMIR
NICE
TREE

54. COLUMN.

Printed by Horace Cox, Bream's Buildings, London, E.C., and published by C. Arthur Pearson Ltd., Pearson's Buildings, Henrietta Street, London, W.C.

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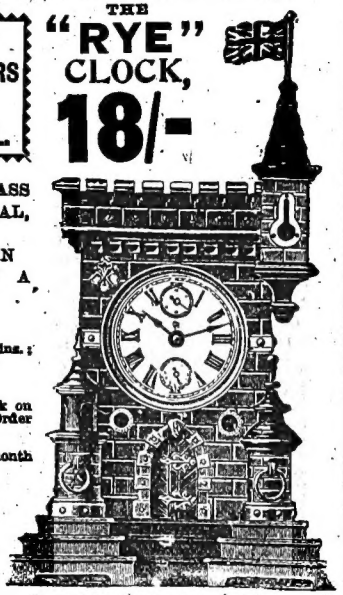

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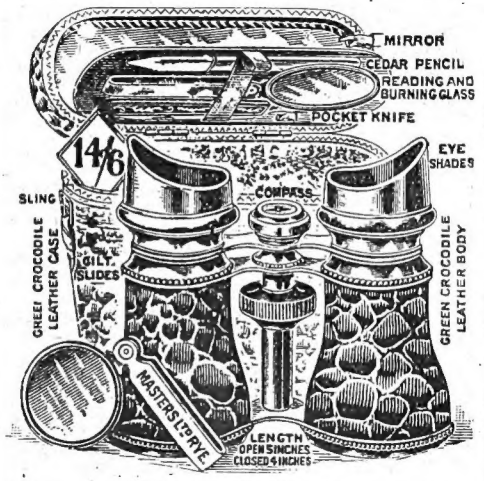

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